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Curtains down on high-voltage Phase 2 campaign

BENGALURU/ NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

The curtains came down on a high-voltage campaigning for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls in 89 seats across 13 states on 26 April.

Campaigning for 14 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka going to polls in the first phase on 26 April also came to an end.

Polling is scheduled in all 20 seats of Kerala, 14 of the 28 seats in Karnataka, 13 seats in Rajasthan, 8 seats each in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, 7 seats in Madhya Pradesh, 5 seats each in Assam and Bihar, 3 seats each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, and 1 seat each in Manipur, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir.

Campaigning for 14 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka, going to polls in the first phase on 26 April, also came to an end **PHOTO: PTI**

Among the prominent contestants are Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar (Thiruvananthapuram), BJP's Tejasvi Surya (Karnataka), Hema Malini and Arun Govil (both Uttar Pradesh), Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi (Wayanad) and Shashi Tharoor (Thiruvananthapuram), Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh (Cong), former Karnataka chief minister HD Kumaraswamy {JD(S)}.

The segments where elections will be held on Friday in State are: Udupi-Chikkamagaluru, Dakshina Kannada, Chitradurga, Tumakuru, Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Bengaluru Rural, Bengaluru North, Bengaluru Central, Bengaluru South and Chikkaballapur.

Karnataka is the most important State for BJP in South India as it's only here that it had held power in the past. The intense campaigning in the last few days saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah leading from the front for BJP, holding rallies and roadshows.

In 2019, the NDA had won 56 of these 89 seats and the UPA 24. Six of these seats have been redrawn as part of the delimitation exercise.

The third phase of polling for 94 seats in 12 states and Union territories will be held on 7 May. *—PTI*

BMRCL extends train timings

Namma Metro will extend its last train services from all four terminal stations on Friday in view of the Lok Sabha elections, Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited said on Wednesday. The last train service from Nagasandra, Silk Institute, Challaghatta and Whitefield (Kadugodi) has been extended till 11.55pm, BMRCL said. "The last train from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station Majestic towards all the four directions will leave at 12.35am on 27 April," it said. Commuters have been advised to travel as per convenience. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Nitin Gadkari faints during M'rashtra rally due to heat

YAVATMAL, 24 APRIL

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday fainted while speaking at an election rally in eastern Maharashtra's Yavatmal district. BJP leader was campaigning at Pusad which comes under the Yavatmal-Washim Lok Sabha constituency. As he suffered a fainting fit, the security personnel accompanying him carried him off-stage. The minister, however, recovered after a few minutes and completed his speech. "Felt uneasy due to heat at a rally at Pusad, Maharashtra. But now I am completely alright and on my way to Warud to take part in the next rally," the 66-year-old leader said in a post on X. *—PTI*

SC stays making of 4 dams in Haryana Wildlife Sanctuary

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the construction of four proposed dams inside Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary in Haryana's Yamunanagar district. A bench of justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta issued notices to the Centre, the Haryana government and others while seeking their replies. The top court noted that the construction of dams will not only be detrimental to wildlife and population in Kalesar, but also to the ecosystem. *—PTI*

SC: Can't stop EVMs solely on suspicion

The court says it can't control EC or elections

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Supreme Court on Wednesday said it cannot "control the elections" or issue directions simply because doubts have been raised about the efficacy of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM).

The court reserved its judgment on petitions claiming the polling devices can be tinkered with to manipulate the results. It said it cannot change the thought process of those doubting the advantages of polling machines and advocating going back to ballot papers.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). It sought answers from an official of the poll panel on whether the microcontrollers fitted in them are reprogrammable.

Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Nitesh Kumar Vyas was summoned by the bench to appear at 2 pm.

Vyas said the microcontrollers are one-time programmable at the time of manufacture and installed in all the three units of EVMs–the balloting unit, VVPAT and the control unit. They cannot be reprogrammed thereafter, he asserted.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO 'Association for Democratic Reforms', claimed the EC official's statement was not fully correct. He cited a report by a private body to back his contention.

"The report says that the kind of memory used in these three units can be reprogrammed. A malicious programme can easily be uploaded at the time of symbol loading," he claimed.

Justice Khanna told Bhushan that the court has to rely on the data and information provided by the EC, a constitutional body.

"We can't control the elections. We are not the controlling authority of another constitutional authority," the court said.

During the hearing, Vyas told the court that microcontrollers installed in balloting unit, control unit and VVPAT cannot be accessed physically in any manner as there is a tamper detection feature which makes an EVM inoperative the moment anyone tries to open the machine.

When senior advocate Santosh Paul, appearing for one of the petitioners, said that source code of EVMs should also be disclosed for transparency, the court rejected his contention. *—PTI*

The court reserved its judgment on petitions claiming the polling devices can be tinkered with to manipulate the results **PHOTO: PTI**

ECIL, BEL refuse to name EVM manufacturers

Electronics Corporation of India Ltd and Bharat Electronics Ltd have refused to disclose the names and contact details of the manufacturers and suppliers of various components of EVMs and VVPATs under the RTI Act citing "commercial confidence", according to RTI responses from the PSUs to an activist. Activist Venkatesh Nayak had filed two identical Right To Information applications with the ECIL and BEL, seeking the details of the manufacturers and suppliers of various components in EVMs.

PROTEST AT NEW HEIGHTS

Troubled by low prices for crops and water shortage, Tamil Nadu farmers climbed many mobile towers during their protest at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi, on Wednesday. They were brought down by fire personnel **PHOTO: ANI**

PM's 'hate speech' now under EC lens

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Amid mounting Opposition pressure, Election Commission is learnt to have started examining complaints against a speech made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rajasthan in which he suggested that if Congress came to power, it would redistribute the wealth of people to Muslims.

Congress and CPI-M had separately urged the poll panel against Modi's speech on Sunday.

Modi on Sunday suggested that if Congress came to power, it would redistribute the wealth of people to Muslims and cited former PM Manmohan Singh's remark that the minority community had the first claim on the country's resources.

Separately, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, in a post on X, also urged the Election Commission to take cognisance of the complaint and launch proceedings against Modi and BJP.

"Urge the ECI to take cognisance of this latest complaint and immediately launch proceedings against Modi BJP. An FIR needs to be lodged for inciting communal passions and hatred," he said.

Congress leader and senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi said it was a "trial of the EC" too. *—PTI*

Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**

FIR over BJP's online post in Bengaluru: EC

Bengaluru, 24 April

An FIR was registered on Wednesday over a social media post by BJP's official handle, which allegedly sought to promote hatred and enmity between different groups and classes, Election Commission (ECI) officials said. Karnataka CEO said the FIR has been lodged by the Flying Squads team of Malleswaram. *—PTI*

Soren moves SC as HC 'delays' hearing on arrest

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren moved Supreme Court, saying the high court is not pronouncing verdict on his plea challenging arrest by Enforcement Directorate, on Wednesday.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta was told by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Soren, that the high court had reserved its verdict on 28 February on his plea but still no decision has been delivered. Sibal said they had approached the top court against his arrest on 2 February but the bench had asked them to move the high court for relief.

Soren, in his plea filed through advocate Pragya Baghel, said there has been a pattern that has emerged which is reflected in the actions of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for prosecuting and targeting individuals' especially political leaders belonging to the opposition on the basis of "cooked-up allegations". *—PTI*

NON-COMPLIANCE OF NORMS

Kotak Bank barred from issuing new credit cards, adding users

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

Cracking down on repeated non-compliance of IT norms, the RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from onboarding new customers through its online and mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards with immediate effect after the regulator found "serious deficiencies" in the lender's IT risk management.

These actions, the RBI said, are necessitated based on significant concerns arising out of Reserve Bank's IT examination of the bank in the last two years and the continued failure on part of the bank to address these concerns in a comprehensive and timely manner.

kotak Kotak Mahindra Bank

PHOTO: PTI

In a statement regarding the supervisory action against Kotak Mahindra Bank, the RBI said: "Serious deficiencies and non-compliances were observed in the areas of IT inventory management, patch and change management, user access management, vendor risk management, data security and data leak prevention strategy, business continuity and disaster recovery rigour and drill, etc."

"The Kotak Mahindra Bank has been directed "to cease and desist", with immediate effect, from onboarding of new customers through its online and mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards."

"The bank shall, however, continue to provide services to its existing customers, including its credit card customers," the statement added.

In an almost similar action, the RBI in December 2020 had barred HDFC Bank from issuing new cards and launching new digital initiatives after repeated instances of technological outages at the lender. The restrictions were later lifted in March 2022. *—PTI*

8,984 MUSTERING CENTRES SET IN B'LURU FOR POLLS

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

As the City gears up for the biggest festival of democracy, the Election Commission has set up 8,984 mustering centres across City to collect materials for the polling booths on Thursday at 9 am.

According to a press release, the City has 28 mustering centres in all four constituencies. Bengaluru Central, North and South have 8 centres each; and Bengaluru Rural has four.

Within Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) limits, a network of 8,984 polling booths are established. Of these, 2,003 booths have been classified as critical, 253 as vulnerable, and 30 as expenditure-sensitive, necessitating heightened vigilance. Furthermore, webcasting facilities will be operational at 4,492 polling booths. *—Salar News*

IED explosion damages bridge on NH 2 in Manipur

IMPHAL, 24 APRIL

A bridge on the National Highway 2 in ethnic violence-hit Manipur's Kangpokpi district was partially damaged in an IED explosion early on Wednesday, disrupting traffic movement in the area, police said. The blast occurred on the bridge between Sapermeina and Koubru Leikha areas around 12.45am, an officer said. No casualties were reported so far in the improvised explosive device (IED) blast, he said. Movement of heavy vehicles has been stopped on the bridge connecting Manipur's capital Imphal with Nagaland's Dimapur. Minutes after the explosion, police personnel rushed to the spot and cordoned off the bridge, he said, adding that an investigation into the IED blast has been initiated. *—PTI*

SP changes mind, Akhilesh to fight from Kannauj

LUCKNOW, 24 APRIL

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav will contest the Lok Sabha elections from Kannauj, the party announced on Wednesday, two days after it had declared another candidate for the Uttar Pradesh seat.

Akhilesh will file his papers on Thursday. On Monday, the SP had declared his nephew Tej Pratap Yadav as its candidate from the Kannauj parliamentary seat. Earlier in the day, when reporters asked Akhilesh about his plans, he said, "It will be clear before the nominations." *—PTI*

If you believe in me, at least come for my funeral: Kharge

Cong prez makes appeal to Kalaburagi voters

Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge *PHOTO: PTI*

KALABURAGI, 24 APRIL

Seeking to strike an emotional chord with the people of his home district of Kalaburagi, Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday appealed to them to at least attend his funeral if they thought he worked for them even though they do not wish to vote for the party candidate here in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking at a poll rally at Afzalpur in Kalaburagi district, the 81-year-old also said if they (people) did not vote for the Congress candidate, he would think that he did not have "any place" in Kalaburagi anymore.

> **I am born for politics. Whether or not I will contest the election, I will strive till my last breath to save the Constitution and democracy of this country. I will not retire from politics.**
>
> -Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

Congress has fielded Kharge's son-in-law Radhakrishna Doddamani from Kalaburagi, against BJP's sitting MP Umesh Jadhav.

He said that he would continue in politics till his last breath to "defeat" the BJP and RSS ideology. "I am born for politics. Whether or not I will contest the election, I will strive till my last breath to save the Constitution and democracy of this country. I will not retire from politics," Kharge asserted.

He advised Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who shared the dais with him, to follow his principles. "I tell Siddaramaiah repeatedly that you may retire as CM or MLA, but you cannot retire from politics till you defeat the ideology of BJP and RSS." *—PTI*

'NO PRACTICAL WISDOM'

Deve Gowda flays Rahul over wealth redistribution vow

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

HD Deve Gowda *PHOTO: PTI*

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda on Wednesday slammed Rahul Gandhi's "wealth redistribution promise", stating only someone with no practical knowledge can speak like that.

The 90-year-old JD(S) supremo ridiculed Congress manifesto claiming that only a party that is sure of never coming to power can make as many promises. Congress wants to turn this country "upside down" and the promises made by it indicated that it wants to come to power "at any cost", he said.

"Rahul Gandhi wants to do a wealth survey and distribute the wealth. Does he think he is a mass leader," Gowda said. "He is dreaming of a revolution. By talking about wealth redistribution, Rahul Gandhi has insulted and humiliated two Congress Prime Ministers who brought market reforms and increased the wealth of the nation," he added, recalling the contribution of PV Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh in economic liberalisation.

Accusing Gandhi of indirectly trying to say what the two Congress Prime Ministers did was wrong, Gowda said, "He (Rahul Gandhi) has torn up their economic reforms like he had torn up an ordinance (which sought to overturn the rule that disqualifies convicted MPs and MLAs) issued by (the then) Manmohan Singh (government)."

> **By talking about wealth redistribution, Rahul Gandhi has insulted and humiliated two Congress Prime Ministers who brought market reforms and increased the wealth of the nation**
>
> -HD Deve Gowda, Former prime minister

Picking up points from the Congress manifesto 'Nyay Patra', Gowda said Rahul Gandhi wants to "give 30 lakh new Central government jobs and run this country". "There are only 40 lakh sanctioned jobs. How can he create 30 lakh more jobs overnight? How much will he pay these people? Where will he employ them," he asked. "Only someone with no practical knowledge can speak like this. (P) Chidambaram was the manifesto committee chairman. Does he agree with Rahul Gandhi's immature economic ideas," Gowda said. *—PTI*

BSY CHALLENGES CONG TO NAME PM CANDIDATE

BS Yediyurappa *PHOTO: PTI*

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

Veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa on Wednesday challenged Congress to name its prime ministerial candidate and reveal the names of at least three to four constituencies in Karnataka where they will win in the Lok Sabha elections.

He also asserted that his party along with alliance partner JD(S) will be victorious in all the 28 Lok Sabha constituencies in the State. "Everyone knows about the cordial bonding between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and JD(S) patriarch and former PM HD Deve Gowda. As BJP and JD(S) are in alliance, they (Congress) have realised the alliance will win every seat with a huge margin, so Congress leaders are saying whatever they want," Yediyurappa said in Tumakuru.

Rejecting Congress' allegations that BJP on coming to power once again will change the Constitution, Yediyurappa termed it a "foolish statement." "No one can touch the Constitution written by Ambedkar. It is sacred and it needs to be saved and taken forward for future generations. Modi has also said the same thing. There is no value for such false propaganda," he said.

—PTI

189 cases of poll violations in State

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

As Karnataka gears up for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections on 26 April, Election Commission on Wednesday said all the polling stations in the Bengaluru Rural and Mysuru constituencies will be webcast. As of now, a total of 189 cases have been booked against political parties or candidates for major violations under Model Code of Conduct (MCC), they said.

Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Meena said 1.4 lakh polling officials will be on duty at the 30,602 polling stations across the 14 constituencies which are going for polls in the first phase on Friday. Besides them, 5,000 micro-observers, 50,000 civil police personnel, 65 companies of Central Parliamentary Force and State Armed Police force of other States will also be deployed for security at these polling stations, he said.

"All the 2,829 polling stations of Bengaluru Rural parliamentary constituency will be 100 per cent webcast. This is as per the request of our returning officers and observers; so we have given more than double central parliamentary force for the Bengaluru Rural Constituency. Seven companies of central paramilitary forces have been inducted at the constituency since 22 April," Meena said.

Of the 30,602 polling stations — 19,701 polling stations will be webcast while 1,370 will be covered via CCTVs, he said. Of the total 189 cases booked against political parties or candidates – 23 are related to hate speeches, 28 related to inducement, and 15 related to misuse of religious places among other MCC violations, the official said. *—PTI*

Cong's dummy candidate will help BJP: KES

Days after expelled from BJP, rebel leader KS Eshwarappa on Wednesday called Geetha Shivarajkumar a dummy candidate filed by Congress to help BJP's BY Raghavendra's win from Shivamogga. Eshwarappa claimed BJP had a secret alliance with Congress in the last Assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

Cast your votes & get free butter dosa, ghee ladoo & other perks

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

Voters in Bengaluru will be treated with complimentary food and beverages at select hotels, as a gesture to encourage voter turnout during Lok Sabha polls on 26 April. Bengalureans can flaunt their inked fingers after voting and enjoy the perks.

Nisarga group of hotels across the City will offer free khali benne dose from 7am to 6pm, along with butter dosa, ghee ladoo and juice for voters. During 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the hotel served 5,100 voters with benne dose. Similarly, Udupi Ruchi outlets in the City will provide free mocktails to voters. Speaking to Salar News, Bruhat Bengaluru Hoteliers' Association President (BBHA) PC Rao said, "We aim to boost the voter turnout in the City by providing free complimentary food."

PHOTO: FREEPIK

A few pubs are offering 20-30 per cent on their drinks and some are offering free beers for the first 50 guests on the day after the election, on Saturday.

There's a plan to reward the first 100 first-time voters with free tickets for Kannada movies on Election Day.

On Tuesday, Karnataka High Court permitted BBHA and others to offer complimentary food for voters, following their petition in 2019. This decision came after Nisarga Grand Hotel had approached the Karnataka HC when the BBMP chief commissioner withdrew permission to provide complimentary food to voters in 2019.

Additionally, Wonderla Amusement Park on Mysuru Road will offer a 15 per cent discount on tickets to customers displaying their voting mark. Vanitha, senior manager of Wonderla told Salar News, "After casting the vote, the families often have a free time to kill. To encourage them to vote and to engage them, we are giving the discount from 26 to 28 April." *—Salar News*

REACHING OUT

Bengaluru Congress Central candidate Mansoor Ali Khan with his father and former Rajya Sabha deputy chairman K Rahman Khan and others at an election meeting at Shanthinagar on Wednesday *PHOTO: SALAR*

ELDERLY TO GET FREE RAPIDO RIDE ON POLLING DAY

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Ride-hailing platform Rapido on Wednesday pledged to offer free bike taxi, auto, and cab rides to specially-abled and senior citizen voters in Karnataka as part of its "SawaariZimmedariKi" initiative.

Voters in Bengaluru, Mysuru and Mangaluru would be able to avail free rides to and from voting points on 26 April by using the code 'VOTENOW'. Rapido's Co-founder Pavan Guntupalli said the move is to ensure that differently-abled, and senior citizen voters have equitable access to exercise their democratic rights.

—PTI

Pvt bus fares go through the roof ahead of voting day

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

A section of private bus operators has increased the fares to cash in on the rush of passengers to get back to their hometowns from Bengaluru to cast a vote for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka on Friday and in view of the summer holidays.

The prices have doubled for the buses towards parts of south Karnataka which go to polls. "This is typically the holiday season and many of them have booked the buses for extended holidays as well," Natraj Sharma, President of Federation of Karnataka State Private Travel Operators Association, told Salar News.

On 25 and 26 April, 300 buses are scheduled to run to areas going to polls such as Udupi, Mandya, Mysuru, Chikkamagaluru, Dakshina Kannada, Hassan, Tumakuru, and Chitradurga, with Udupi and Mangaluru as the final destinations. "The amount of people travelling in these two days comes up to 10,000-15,000. The bookings were generally done for group travellers, and we did not see many single passengers in any bus," Sharma said.

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation officials said their ticket prices remain unchanged despite the peak in demand. "KSRTC will be providing around 2,100-2,700 buses for Lok Sabha polling duties. The number of buses depends on the requirement in various districts," said Dr Latha TS, Public Relations Officer of KSRTC. Similarly, BMTC will be deploying 1,700 buses for polling duties in the City itself."

Keralities make beeline to go back home

Keralities living in the City are making a beeline to travel back home to exercise their franchise on Friday. Kerala Road Transport Corporation and Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation have introduced 10 additional bus services to Kannur, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Thiruvananthapuram and Malappuram. They are offering flexi rates with discounts for booking the return trip. *—Salar News*

Bus prices to different districts in Karnataka and Kerala (AC sleeper bus)

PHOTO: PTI

FROM	DESTINATION	17 APRIL	24 APRIL
Bengaluru	Mangaluru, Karnataka	Rs 1,400	Rs 2,600
Bengaluru	Udupi, Karnataka	Rs 1,500	Rs 2,500
Bengaluru	Chitradurga, Karnataka	Rs 1,200	Rs 2,390
Bengaluru	Kottayam. Kerala	Rs 2,900	Rs 3,350
Bengaluru	Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala	Rs 3,000	Rs 3,500

Rly introduces 2 special trains for LS elections

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

South Western Railways introduced two special trains to operate from Bengaluru to Mangaluru and Yeshwanthpur to Kundapura.

Train No. 06553 will depart from Sir M Visvesvaraya Terminal, Bengaluru, at 6pm on 25 April and arrive at Mangaluru Central at 10am on Election Day on Friday. In the return direction, Train No. 06554 will depart from Mangaluru Central at noon on 26 April and reach SMVT Bengaluru at 3am the following day.

The train will make stops at Krishnarajapuram, Bangarpet, Salem, Erode, Tiruppur, Coimbatore, Palakkad, Shoranur, Tirur, Kozhikode, Vadakara, Thalassery, Kannur, Payyanur and Kasaragod.

Having a total of 22 coaches, the trains consist of one 2-tier AC, four 3-tier AC, eight sleeper, four general class and two luggage-cum-brake van coaches.

Yeshwantpur-Kundapura Special will depart from Yeshwantpur at 11:20pm on 25 April and reach Kundapura at 10:45am the next day, with stops at Nelamangala, Kunigal, Hassan, Sakleshpur, Subrahmanya Road, Kabakaputtur, Bantwal, Surathkal, Mulki, Udupi and Barkur stations. Train No. 06548 will depart from Kundapura at 11:20am on 26 April and reach Yeshwantpur at 9:50pm. *—Salar News*

TEACHER GETS 25-YR JAIL FOR RAPING MINOR

KOLAR, 24 APRIL

A private school teacher who raped and impregnated a minor girl student was given a 25-year jail term and a fine of Rs 50,000. Shivakumar, is a resident of Jangampalli in Srinivaspur taluk. The teacher in Addagal village lured the girl who was studying in 8th standard and raped her on 5 August, 2023. The court had also ordered Rs 3 lakh compensation to the victim who has now delivered the child.

—Salar News

ZERO SHADOW DAY

Students witness Zero Shadow Day at Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium in Bengaluru on Wednesday. On Zero Shadow Day, shadows of objects disappear when Sun reaches its highest point *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Old pics circulated to defame daughter: Neha's dad

HUBBALLI, 24 APRIL

Niranjan Hiremath, the Congress councillor and father of 23-year-old Neha Hiremath, who was stabbed to death by a stalker on her college campus, alleged on Wednesday that old photographs and video clips of his daughter were being circulated on social media to divert public attention from the severity of the crime.

Speaking to ANI on Wednesday, Niranjan, a sitting councillor from Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation, said, "Today marks the sixth day since my daughter's death. While we struggling to come to terms with her loss, someone out there is posting old photographs of my daughter on social media, using fake IDs, to defame her even in death. We did lodge a complaint with the cyber police about this but no step has yet been taken to prevent such attempts to dishonour my daughter."

"I urge the cyber police to stop the circulation of my daughter's images at the earliest. My daughter wasn't at fault. She was the victim of a conspiracy. Nobody should form misplaced opinions about my daughter on the evidence of the photos and video clips," he added. *—ANI*

Accused sent to 6-day CID custody, taken to crime scene

HUBBALLI, 24 APRIL

Crime Investigation Department (CID) has taken over the investigation into the murder of Neha Hiremath at a college in Hubballi. Commissioner of Police, Hubballi-Dharwad, handed over the case files to the 8-member CID team led by SP Venkatesh and DySP Manohar. The CID team took the custody of Fayaz from Dharwad Central Jail and was also granted a 6-day custody. The security officials then took him to hospital for a medical examination and to crime scene at the college. *—Salar News*

BJP's Nityanand Rai owns assets worth Rs 15.45 Cr

PATNA, 24 APRIL

C Senior BJP leader and Union Minister Nityanand Rai, seeking re-election from Ujiarpur Lok Sabha seat in Bihar under the NDA banner, has declared movable and immovable assets totaling Rs 15.45 crore in his filed affidavit. His wife's assets amount to Rs 2.47 crore. Rai submitted his nomination papers for Ujiarpur on Tuesday, with elections for Ujiarpur, Darbhanga, Samastipur, Begusarai, and Munger Lok Sabha seats scheduled for the fourth phase on 13 May. He had won the 2014 and 2019 general elections from Ujiarpur as a BJP candidate, aerved as BJP Bihar president in 2016. *—PTI*

AICC member Rajkumar Chauhan resigns from Cong

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Former Delhi minister and All India Congress Committee member Rajkumar Chauhan on Wednesday resigned from the party, a day after the meeting of Delhi Congress' disciplinary committee, party officials said. A party leader said that Chauhan, who was involved in an alteration with AICC Delhi in-charge Deepak Babria on Sunday, submitted his resignation on Wednesday morning. On Tuesday, Delhi Congress' disciplinary committee held a meeting and left it to the AICC to decide on whether to take any action on complaints against Chauhan. On Monday, a section of Congress workers also held a protest against the nomination of former BJP MP Udit Raj as the party's Lok Sabha poll candidate from North West Delhi. The protesters gathered outside the Congress office at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg and raised slogans against "outsiders" fielded by the party in the elections. *—PTI*

FIR against BJP candidate for violating poll code

DHANBAD, 24 APRIL

An FIR has been registered against BJP candidate from Dhanbad Lok Sabha seat Dulu Mahto and five of his supporters for allegedly violating the model code of conduct (MCC) on Wednesday. Baghmara MLA allegedly held an election rally on 15 April at Pathrakuli football ground under Dhansar police station without obtaining any prior permission from concerned authority, said Dhanbad Sadar Circle officer (CO) Shashikant Sinker. After a purported video clip of BJP candidate's rally went viral on social media, Sinker on 16 April took cognisance and directed Dhanbad revenue deputy inspector Devendra Kumar to conduct a probe into the matter. Dhansar police station registered an FIR against them for violating MCC on Tuesday evening. Besides Mahto, election rally organizers Sona Rajak, Manoj Chouhan, Binod Chouhan, Sanjay Chouhan and Banti Singh have also been named in the FIR, he said. *—PTI*

'Viriato Fernandes' comments not unconstitutional'

PANAJI, 24 APRIL

Goa Congress chief Amit Patkar on Wednesday defended his party's South Goa Lok Sabha seat nominee Viriato Fernandes over his remarks on the Constitution, claiming he had not said anything unconstitutional. Fernandes was raising the issue of dual citizenship for Goans who have opted for Portuguese passports, Patkar told reporters. The state Congress president also said they have not yet received any information about BJP's complaint against Fernandes over his statement. Fernandes on Monday said the Constitution was "forced" on Goa after its liberation from the Portuguese rule in 1961. Goa, which has two Lok Sabha seats, will vote on 7 May in the third phase of polling. *—PTI*

Cong gave religion-based quota in Karnataka: PM

'Constitution doesn't allow religion-based reservation'

SAGAR, 24 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday accused Congress of reducing the quota for the OBCs in Karnataka by putting Muslims castes in the same category, and claimed that it plans to replicate this across the country.

Speaking at an election rally in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, he dubbed the opposition party as the "biggest enemy of the OBCs".

In the past, it had provided reservation based on religion which India's Constitution does not allow, Modi said. In 2004, Congress provided reservation on the basis of religion, stabbing Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, architect of the Constitution, in the back, he said.

"Our Constitution clearly says that no one will be given reservation on the basis of religion.

Babasaheb Ambedkar himself was against reservation on the basis of religion. But Congress made a dangerous resolution of (providing) reservation on the basis of religion years ago. It is adopting various tactics to fulfill the resolution," he said.

In Karnataka, the party provided such a quota by resorting to an illegal trick, Modi said.

"All castes of Muslims have been added to the OBC quota. By doing this, the huge rights given to OBCs were snatched away and given (to others) on the basis of religion," the prime minister said, claiming that Congress wanted to implement the same model in the entire country.

"The biggest enemy of the OBC community is Congress, which has snatched away their rights. Congress has murdered social justice, violated the s pirit of the Constitution and insulted Babasaheb," he added.

—PTI

Our Constitution clearly says that no one will be given reservation on the basis of religion. But Congress made a dangerous resolution of (providing) reservation on the basis of religion years ago.It is adopting various tactics to fulfill the resolution

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

No force can stop caste census: Rahul Gandhi

'Deshbhakts are scared of the X-ray of caste census'

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying those who call themselves 'deshbhakt' are scared of the 'X-ray' of caste census but "no force" can stop it.

Addressing the 'Samajik Nyay Sammelan' here, Gandhi said he is not interested in caste but in 'nyay' (justice) and asserted that it is his life's mission to ensure justice for the 90 percent of the population against whom injustice has been done.

"As soon as our government is formed, the first thing that would be done is a caste census," Gandhi said.

Modi has transferred Rs 16 lakh crore to select business people and Congress is going to return a small amount to the 90 per cent of the population, he said.

"We have calculated...what we felt is justice and that help should be given, we put it down in the manifesto," he said of the party's guarantees mentioned in the manifesto.

Taking a swipe at the media for dubbing him a "non-serious" politician in the past, the former Congress chief cited his involvement with MGNREGA scheme, Land Acquisition Bill, Bhatta Parsaul movement, Niyamgiri Hills matter, and said for the media all this was "non-serious" while talking about Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai and Virat Kohli was serious.

"So the loudspeaker is not with you.. Whose money goes into media, governments give money, whose money is it it comes in GST. This is the money of the 90 per cent people," he said addressing the gathering largely comprising those belonging to Dalits, tribals and backward organisations.

—PTI

As soon as our government is formed, the first thing that would be done is a caste census. We have calculated...what we felt is justice and that help should be given, we put it down in the manifesto

-Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

Two partners of 'INDI Alliance' - Communists and Congress - come together on one stage in Delhi but in Kerala and Bengal they fight. Their fight is fake... 'ilu-ilu' is going on

-Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

The prices of essential commodities are rising under BJP rule, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the saffron party are diverting attention from real issues

-Priyanka Gandhi, Congress Gen Secretary

Modi ki ek hi guarantee, Musalmano se nafrat ki guarantee (There is only one Modi guarantee, and is to hate Muslims). Since 2002, he has been spreading hate

-Asaduddin Owaisi, AIMIM President

Modiji is afraid of these invisible voters who will come out in the election.... They (Modi and Shah) want power for them (Ambani and Adani) and not for you

-Mallikarjun Kharge, AICC Chief

INDIA bloc is ghamandiya gathbandhan (group of arrogant parties) and all leaders in it only want to work for the betterment of their families.... Majority of the leaders of the INDIA are either in jail or on bail

-JP Nadda, BJP President

CLEAN CHIT

Relief for Sunetra in Rs 25K cr scam

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) gave a clean chit to Sunetra Pawar, wife of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who was named as the ruling NDA's surprise pick for Baramati Lok Sabha constituency, in the Rs 25,000 crore Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank (MSCB) 'scam' case.

The EOW stated in its closure report that it did not see any criminality or wrongdoing in the matter, adding that the bank in question did not suffer any losses in the process of sanctioning loans or selling the Jarandeshwar Sugar Mill.

The closure report comes at a time when the leaders in the Opposition combine--INDIA, have renewed their 'washing machine' charge at BJP, claiming that probe agencies go slow on dissident leaders once they jump ship and join the ruling party at the Centre.

The closure reports says EOW did not find any wrongdoing *PHOTO: PTI*

According to EOW, Sunetra, who is up against sitting MP and NCP patriarch Sharad Pawar's daughter, Supriya Sule, in the battle for Baramati; resigned from the post of director of Jai Agrotech in 2008, two years after which the firm allocated Rs 20.25 crore to Jarandeshwar Sugar Mill.

Jarandeshwar paid Rs 65.53 crore to Guru Commodity in rent, the EOW stated in its report.

The closure report says the EOW did not find any criminal wrongdoing in the case. All Opposition leaders, accused of some wrongdoing or the other, get clean chits after joining the BJP. They make allegations against Opposition leaders, only to get them on their side thereafter and ensure they get a clean chit." *—ANI*

Cong refutes claims of inheritance tax plans

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Refuting BJP's claim that Congress aims to impose inheritance tax in the country, party leader Jairam Ramesh said that it was former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi who abolished the Estate Duty in 1985.

Taking to X, Ramesh said, "Congress has no plan whatsoever to introduce an inheritance tax. In fact, Rajiv abolished Estate Duty in 1985."

He also shared a video of BJP MP Jayant Sinha, in which the former minister of state is advocating for estate taxes in the country.

"Please listen to BJP MP Sinha, once MoS Finance in the Modi Sarkar, and later Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Finance. He has spent 15 long minutes vehemently arguing in favour of an Inheritance Tax of 55per cent, like in the US," Ramesh added.

Jairam Ramesh *PHOTO: PTI*

In the 19-second video clip shared by Ramesh, Sinha can be seen talking about 50 to 55 per cent estate tax to level the field and create opportunities.

A controversy erupted after the Chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress, Sam Pitroda while emphasising the need for policy toward wealth redistribution spoke about the concept of inheritance tax prevailing in America and said that these are issues that will need to be discussed. *—ANI*

ROBERT VADRA'S POSTER SPARKS NOMINATION BUZZ

AMETHI, 24 APRIL

Even as Congress is yet to announce its candidate for the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh's Amethi constituency, posters featuring Robert Vadra, husband of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, appeared outside the party's office on Wednesday in the Gauriganj area of Amethi.

This development has fueled speculation about his potential candidacy, as the nomination filing deadline rapidly approaches. The sighting of Vadra's posters comes shortly a day after Union Minister and BJP candidate for Amethi, Smriti Irani took a jibe at Rahul Gandhi and his brother-in-law. "Jijaji ki nazar hai, saale sahab kya karenge?"

Smriti Irani defeated Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Amethi. *—ANI*

74 per cent turnout in Arunachal Pradesh repolling

ITANAGAR, 24 APRIL

An estimated 74 per cent voter turnout was recorded in the repolling at eight polling stations across four Assembly constituencies of Arunachal Pradesh conducted on Wednesday amid elaborate security arrangements, an election official said.

The poll percentage, however, is likely to go up as hundreds of voters stood in queues to exercise their franchise even after the scheduled time for voting was over.

The repolling was necessitated following reports of violence, including damage to electronic voting machines (EVMs), during the simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the state on 19 April, the official said.

PHOTO: PTI

An estimated 82.71 per cent of the total 8,92,694 voters had exercised their franchise on 19 April to elect 50 MLAs for the 60-member Assembly in the northeastern state.

—PTI

THREE-WAY FIGHT

Cong campaigns against own candidate in Banswara LS seat

BANSWARA, 24 APRIL

A peculiar poll battle is on the cards in the tribal-dominated Banswara-Dungarpur Lok Sabha constituency in Rajasthan where the Congress is appealing to the people not to vote for its candidate.

After much flip-flop, Congress decided to support Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) candidate Rajkumar Roat -- a day before the last date of withdrawal of nominations -- despite fielding its own candidate Arvind Damor.

What was supposed to be a bipolar contest between BJP and Congress-BAP alliance has turned into a three-way fight with Damor likely to divide the Congress votes thus, giving an edge to the saffron party candidate -- Mahendrajit Singh Malviya.

While the local leadership of the Congress has appealed to the people to vote for Roat instead of their own candidate, Damor has claimed that he has the support of a section of the party leaders who are against the alliance with BAP.

Rajasthan Congress in charge Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa announced on social media that the party would support BAP in both elections. *—PTI*

By inducting Chavan, BJP is part of Adarsh Society: Uddhav

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 24 APRIL

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday hit out BJP, saying that by inducting former Congress leader Ashok Chavan, the ruling party has also become a part of the multi-crore Adarsh Housing Society scam now.

Earlier, BJP used to target Chavan saying the families of martyrs were fooled in the Adarsh scam, but now the same party is involved in fooling them, he alleged.

Thackeray was addressing a press conference at Nanded in Maharashtra, where he arrived to campaign for the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) candidate Vasant Chavan from the Nanded Lok Sabha constituency..

Ashok Chavan *PHOTO: PTI*

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in 2014 sought to delete Chavan's name from the case but this was rejected both by the special CBI court and later by the Bombay High Court in 2015. *—PTI*

ELECTION RITUAL

Tripura village to vote with no motorable road, electricity

CHAWMANU, 24 APRIL

Bikramjoy Tripura, a 'jhumia' (shifting cultivator) residing at remote Vidya Kumar Roaja Para village in Tripura's Dhalai district, said politicians come to our hamlet during elections and promise development but none of their promises has been fulfilled but still, they will vote in the Lok Sabha elections.

The main problem of the village, which is located around 62 km away from Ambassa, the district headquarters of Dhalai is connectivity as the village does not have a motorable road from Chawmanu, the block headquarters, he told the PTI reporter who visited this remote village.

There is no electricity, mobile connectivity or healthcare facility in our village, he said.

"The Lok Sabha election is coming and we all will vote on 26 April but it remains a five-year ritual for us because it will bring no solution to our problems", the 41-year-old said.

"During monsoon, the village which houses 763 jhumia families, all involved in shifting cultivation, remains cut off from the rest of the state. The road from Chawmanu to Vidya Kumar Roaja Para (Thalcherra) turned into a death trap because of the lack of repair for the past several years. Jhumia families living in 11 villages need to travel 10 to 20 km on foot to collect ration as there is no road from Vidya Kumar Roaja para to their villages," said Bikramjit, a local BJP leader.

No promises have been fulfilled, yet they will vote in LS polls *PHOTO: PTI*

"We have smartphones but cannot use them because there is no electricity in the village. To charge a mobile we have to travel 10-12 km which is close to Chawmanu block headquarters," he said.

Chardene Tripura, an elderly woman, echoed the same problems of her native village Vidya Kumar Roaja Para (Thalcherra).

"We have not seen our MLA Shambu Lal Chakma for many months. He does visit us when the election comes. Hope he will visit our village soon to seek votes", said the 54-year-old woman.

The village falls under East Tripura Lok Sabha constituency which goes to voting on April 26.

Sitting MP of Tripura East Lok Sabha constituency Rebati Tripura said he had taken up the connectivity issue of the villagers with the Centre several times. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Man kills wife and daughter over dispute, held

AKOLA, 24 APRIL

A 33-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly hacking to death his wife and nine-year-old daughter in Akola city of Maharashtra on Wednesday over a family dispute, police said.

According to police, the accused Manish Mhatre attacked his wife Rashmi and daughter Mahi when they were asleep in the early hours, an official said.

Rashmi was living separately with her daughter in Nanded city due to frequent quarrels with her husband.

"On Tuesday, she and Mahi came to Akola to attend her relative's wedding. Manish fatally attacked them in the wee hours with an axe," the official said, adding that the accused didn't run away from the spot and waited for police. He was arrested on the charge of murder under the Indian Penal Code, he added. *—PTI*

15 flights diverted from Delhi due to sudden rains

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

As many as 15 flights have been diverted from Delhi due to the adverse weather conditions in the national capital, Airport sources said. According to the sources, nine flights were diverted to Jaipur, two to Amritsar, two to Lucknow, one to Mumbai, and one to Chandigarh. Meanwhile, New Delhi experienced a sudden change in weather as rain lashed several parts of Delhi on Tuesday evening. The brief spell of rain gave some relief to the commuters who have been facing the scorching heat in April. Earlier, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday said that the temperature in Delhi is expected to remain around 38 degrees Celsius in the coming 2-3 days adding that there is a possibility of light rain on Monday. *—ANI*

Ex-faculty of Kalakshetra held for sexual assault

CHENNAI, 24 APRIL

A 51-year-old former faculty member of city-based Kalakshetra Foundation has been arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting two ex-students, police said. The arrested was identified as Sheehjith Krishna. Based on the directions of the Madras High Court, a preliminary enquiry was conducted on the complaint of two women that Krishna sexually assaulted them when they were students of Kalakshetra during the period 1995-2007, an official release on Tuesday said. A case was registered against Krishna at the Neelankarai All-Women Police Station and a team led by an inspector arrested him. The accused was later remanded to judicial custody. *—PTI*

Tripura schools to shut from 24-27 April due to heat

AGARTALA, 24 APRIL

With Tripura reeling under heatwave conditions, the government ordered that all schools in the state will remain closed from 24-27 April, an official said on Wednesday.

An IMD bulletin said the state recorded 37 degrees Celsius which is around 3 degrees Celsius more than the normal level on Wednesday. The temperature may go up to 39 degrees Celsius by the end of the current week in the northeastern state.

"The entire state is reeling under heatwave conditions and this condition will continue for some more days. In view of this heatwave and humid weather the state government has declared it a state-specific disaster," an official said.

He said the district-level disaster management authorities were advised to conduct awareness among the public. *—PTI*

WB govt moves SC against cancellation of 25K job

WB says HC cancelled school staff appointments arbitrarily

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

The West Bengal government has moved Supreme Court against the Calcutta High Court order invalidating the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff made by the state's School Service Commission (SSC) in state-run and state-aided schools.

Challenging the High Court order, the state government, in its appeal filed before the top court, said the court cancelled the appointments "arbitrarily".

"The High Court failed to appreciate the ramification of cancelling the entire selection process leading to straightaway termination of teaching and non-teaching staff from service with immediate effect, without giving sufficient time to the petitioner state to deal with such an exigency, rendering the education system at a stand-still," the plea said.

PHOTO: PTI

- The division bench had also rejected a prayer by some appellants, including the West Bengal SSC, for a stay on the order and asked the commission to initiate a fresh appointment process within a fortnight from the date of the results of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections

The Calcutta High Court had on Monday declared the selection process as "null and void" and directed the CBI to probe the appointment process. It had also asked the central agency to submit a report within three months.

The High Court said those appointed outside the officially available 24,640 vacancies, appointed after the expiry of the official date of recruitment, and those who submitted blank Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) sheets but obtained appointment to return all remunerations and benefits received by them with 12 per cent interest per annum within four weeks.

The High Court held that all appointments involved were violative of Articles 14 (equality before law) and 16 (prohibiting discrimination in employment in any government office) of the Constitution.

The division bench had also rejected a prayer by some appellants, including the West Bengal SSC, for a stay on the order and asked the commission to initiate a fresh appointment process within a fortnight from the date of the results of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

The bench, constituted by the Chief Justice of High Court on a direction of Supreme Court, had heard 350 petitions and appeals relating to the selection of candidates for appointment by the SSC in the categories of teachers of classes 9, 10, 11 and 12 and group-C and D staffers through the SLST-2016. *—PTI*

IN SUPREME COURT

Electoral bonds: Plea seeks SIT probe into 'quid pro quo'

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

A plea has been filed in Supreme Court seeking a court-monitored probe by an special investigation team (SIT) into the alleged instances of "apparent quid pro quo" between political parties, corporates and officials of investigating agencies in donations via electoral bonds.

A five-judge constitution bench of the apex court had on 15 February scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding.

Following a Supreme Court directive, the State Bank of India, which was the authorised seller of electoral bonds, had shared the data with the Election Commission, which later made the data public.

The electoral bonds scheme, which was notified by the government on 2 January, 2018, was pitched as an alternative to cash donations made to political parties as part of its efforts to bring transparency in political funding.

The plea, filed through advocate Prashant Bhushan, has sought a direction to the authorities to investigate the source of funding of "shell companies and loss-making companies" to various political parties, as has been disclosed through the electoral bonds data.

It has also sought a direction to the authorities to recover the amounts from political parties as donated by companies to them as part of "quid pro quo arrangements where these are found to be proceeds of crime". *—PTI*

The archeological survey began on 22 March PHOTO: X@STARBOY2079

ASI ends survey at Bhojshala in MP

DHAR, 24 APRIL

The ongoing survey by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) of the Bhojshala Complex located in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district, which started on 22 March, ended on Tuesday.

ASI has to submit the report to the Indore High Court on 29 April, but the ASI has submitted an application seeking 8 more weeks for the survey.

On Tuesday, a team from the ASI reached the Bhojshala in the morning, with 21 members and 32 labourers. Along with ASI team, Gopal Sharma and Ashish Goyal from the Hindu side and Abdul Samad Khan from the Muslim side also reached the complex.

According to an arrangement in 2003, Hindus perform puja at the complex on Tuesdays from sunrise to sunset while Muslims offer namaz on Fridays from 1 pm to 3 pm.

Following the direction of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, the ASI began an archaeological survey at the Bhojshala Complex on 22 March.

For Hindus, the Complex is a temple dedicated to Goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati), while for Muslims, it is the site of the Kamal Maula mosque.

On 1 April, Supreme Court refused to stay the 11 March High Court order directing ASI to conduct within six weeks a survey of the Bhojshala Temple cum Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Dhar district. High Court had also directed the ASI to constitute an expert committee that will "complete scientific investigation, survey and excavation, through the adoption of latest methods and techniques" and submit the report within six weeks. The next hearing into the matter is scheduled on 29 April. *—ANI*

No poison found in Ansari's body: Report

LUCKNOW, 24 APRIL

Contrary to the allegations of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari's family members, no poison was detected in the viscera of Ansari who died in an Uttar Pradesh jail last month, officials said here on Wednesday.

The postmortem report of Ansari, who was lodged in Banda jail and died on 28 March, had earlier said that the reason for his death was "myocardial refraction" or heart attack. Ansari's family, however, had been insisting that he was subjected to slow poisoning in jail.

He was brought to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail in "an unconscious state" and, according to its principal Suneel Kaushal.

- Ansari was a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar. He was behind bars in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab since 2005. He had 60 criminal cases pending against him

"We have got the Forensic Science Lab report that has confirmed that no traces of poison were found in the viscera. This has been given to the probe panel led by Banda Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate," a senior officer said.

Mukhtar Ansari PHOTO: PTI

Viscera is a sample of internal organs of the body such as the liver, spleen, stomach and bladder.

Reacting to the report which came out on Tuesday, Ansari's brother Afzal, who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls on a Samajwadi Party ticket, said they do not trust either the postmortem or the viscera reports. "The correct sample of viscera was not sent for investigation," Ansari said in Ghazipur.

The 63-year-old Ansari was a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar. He had been behind bars in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab since 2005. He had over 60 criminal cases pending against him.

Ansari was sentenced in eight cases since September 2022 by different courts in Uttar Pradesh and was lodged in the Banda jail. His name was on the list of 66 gangsters issued by Uttar Pradesh Police last year. *—PTI*

67 suspects detained over civilian's murder in Rajouri

JAMMU, 24 APRIL

As many as 67 suspected people were detained for questioning in connection with the killing of a civilian by two Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists in a village in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said on Wednesday.

During investigations, credible evidence was obtained and the police identified one of the two terrorists involved in committing this act as a "foreign terrorist" with code name Abu Hamza, the officials said.

Police further released the pictures of Hamza and announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh on him, they said.

Mohammad Razaq, 40, was killed on Monday in the Kunda Top village of the Thanamandi area. Razaq worked in the government's Social Welfare department while his brother Mohammad Tahir Choudhary is a soldier in the Territorial Army, who escaped unhurt.

Police along with security forces are deployed in the twin districts of Rajouri-Poonch to neutralise the group PHOTO: ANI

Police along with security forces deployed in the twin districts of Rajouri-Poonch range are working in close synergy to neutralise this group and dismantle their support ecosystem, they said.

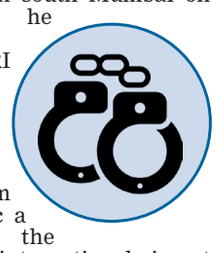
Additional Director General of Police, Jammu zone, Anand Jain, visited Rajouri to reinforce security measures in the border district. *—PTI*

Smuggling racket busted, Rs 10cr goods seized

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence has busted a gold smuggling syndicate in Mumbai and seized the precious metal, cash and other valuables of Rs 10.48 crore, a DRI official said on Wednesday.

Four people, including two African nationals, were arrested following a search operation at a gold melting facility in south Mumbai on Monday, he said.



The DRI had received an input that gold smuggled from Africa through the Mumbai international airport was being processed at a melting facility in Zaveri Bazar here to remove the foreign markings and it was then being diverted to the local market, the official said in a statement.

During the search at the melting facility, the officials seized 9.31 kg of gold in various forms, including of foreign-origin, and 16.66 kg of silver.

They nabbed the unit operator and a recruiter, who was responsible for arranging carriers, collecting the smuggled gold from African nationals for melting and further processing, the statement said. *—PTI*

AIUDF to move SC against closure of govt madrassas in Assam

GUWAHATI, 24 APRIL

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) Chief Badruddin Ajmal has said he will move Supreme Court against the Assam government's decision to close the state-run madrassas.

The sitting Dhubri MP expressed hope that the apex court will order reopening of all closed madrasas in Assam.

"UP announced the closure of madrasas and later, Supreme Court condemned them. With this, we will go to Supreme Court and will get the order from there," Ajmal said on the sidelines of an election campaign on Tuesday.

In December last year, 1,281 Upper Primary Middle English (ME) Madrassas were converted into general ME schools across Assam. Earlier in April 2021, all the 610 state-run madrassas under the Madrassa Board were converted into upper primary, high and higher secondary schools with no change of status, pay, allowances and service conditions of teaching and non-teaching staff. In December 2020,

The Assam Madrassa Education (Provincialisation) Act, 1995 and Assam Madrassa Education (Provincialisation of Services of Employees and Re-Organisation of Madrassa Educational Institutions) Act, 2018 were repealed. This move of the first BJP-led Assam government paved the way for all state-funded madrassas to shut down and transform them into general schools. *—PTI*

SPREADING MISINFORMATION

Case against X user over Ranveer's deepfake

Ranveer Singh PHOTO: PTI

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

Maharashtra police's cyber cell has registered an FIR against an X user for allegedly uploading a 'deepfake' or manipulated video in which actor Ranveer Singh appeared to be making an appeal to vote for Congress, an official said.

The First Information Report (FIR) was registered on Tuesday on a complaint filed by the actor's father, Jugjeet Singh Bhavnani, against the user @sujataindia1st, the official said.

Singh gave an interview to the media while he was in Varanasi to promote a fashion show and praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

- Ranveer Singh never said this, and he does not have any relation with any political party, his father said in the complaint

according to the complaint.

The actor said "it is Modi ji's purpose and goal to celebrate our rich culture, heritage, history, and legacy because we are moving ahead towards modernity very fast but we should never forget our roots, our cultural heritage," as per the FIR.

But X account holder @sujataindia1st made a deepfake video in which the actor is heard saying it is "Modi ji's purpose and goal to celebrate our painful life, fear, and unemployment because we are moving ahead towards injustice but we should never stop asking for our development and justice, vote for justice, vote for Congress," the FIR said.

Ranveer Singh never said this, and he does not have any relation with any political party, his father said in the complaint.

Deepfake videos are the ones which have been altered, in a convincing way, to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that was not actually done or said. *—PTI*

12-yr-old tribal girl raped, murdered in M'rashtra

GONDIA, 24 APRIL

A 12-year-old tribal girl has been allegedly raped and murdered in Maharashtra's Gondia district, police said on Wednesday.

The incident took place on 19 April, they said, adding that efforts were on to nab the unidentified culprit.

Some tribal organisations staged a demonstration on Tuesday and Wednesday outside the Deori sub-divisional magistrate's office and warned of intensifying the stir if the culprit was not arrested at the earliest.

The victim, a class 6 student, accompanied her parents to a relative's marriage ceremony in Gotanpar village of Deori tehsil on 19 April.

She was allegedly abducted from there by an unidentified person, a police official said.

After being unable to trace the girl, her parents launched a search. The victim's decomposed body was found on 20 April in the Dhawalkhedi forest near the Gotanpar village, he said.

A team from Chichgarh police station reached the spot after being alerted and subsequently registered a case under relevant provisions. *—PTI*

FARMERS PROTEST

Farmers from Tamil Nadu during a protest at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi, on Wednesday. They are demanding profitable prices, pensions and insurance ***PHOTO: PTI***

EC issues list of dos and dont's for voters as India sizzles

EC has also directed authorities to provide Assured Minimum Facilities to prevent heat strokes, dehydration and health conditions ***PHOTO: PTI***

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has stated that temperatures may be above normal during the various stages of polling leading up to 4 June, when results are finally declared.

The election body has consequently issued a list of dos and don'ts for voters to follow so as to prevent heat-related health issues. It has also directed authorities at polling stations to provide Assured Minimum Facilities, including those to prevent heat strokes, dehydration and health conditions.

"I am directed to state that India Meteorological Department (IMD) has indicated the probability of above normal temperatures during forthcoming summer season, which may translate into stronger and longer spells of heatwave especially during months of March to June, 2024. In this regard, a copy of Do's & Don'ts issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) regarding minimisation of Heat wave impact, is being forwarded herewith," Vibhor Agrawal, under-secretary of the ECI said in a statement released on 22 April.

"Further, a copy of Commission's letter No. 464/INST-AMF/2022/EPS, dated 10 June, 2023, regarding Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) and other facilities to be provided at the Polling Stations, is also being forwarded for strict compliance by all concerned," the statement added.

Water and shade

AMFs, according to the ECI, are provided at polling stations for assistance and facilitations to voters to enable them to cast their votes on the day of the poll in a smooth, hassle¬ free and convenient manner.

They also provide an enabling framework to the polling personnel to discharge their duty in an efficient manner.

The ECI's statement lists water and shade among the AMFs that can prevent heat-related conditions.

"There should preferably be permanent arrangement of tap facility for drinking water. As an alternative, drinking water pots having sufficient capacity on the day of poll may be provided," it noted.

The document added that sufficient number of environment-friendly disposable glasses may be made available for drinking water.

"Drinking water facility should be on self-service basis and wherever possible provision of volunteer/ daily wage-earner to serve water to the voters standing in the queue, may be made," it stated.

The ECI also urged the chief electoral officers and district electoral officers to provide adequate shade at polling stations.

"Tented arrangement for shade with adequate size (minimum 15ft X15ft) canopy should be made available, as waiting area, at each Polling Station with sufficient chairs/ benches preferably for ladies/ senior citizens/nursing mothers/differently abled voters and children accompanying them," the ECI statement noted.

It added that during summer, every polling party shall be supplied with Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) for their own use as well as for any voter needing the same due to heat-stroke.

"A hand-bill on 'Dos and Don'ts' in case of heat stroke may be prepared and supplied to each of the polling parties," the statement said.

An appeal to the electors may be issued to carry wet towels to protect themselves against dehydration and also advise women electors to avoid bringing children along with them to polling stations during hot weather conditions, it concluded.

—Downtoearth

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساہ

2.4 billion workers exposed to extreme heat globally

Agricultural workers have been worst affected ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

More than 70 per cent of all workers worldwide are at risk of exposure to excessive heat, posing significant threats to their safety and health, a new report by International Labour Organization (ILO) has warned.

Out of a global workforce of 3.4 billion, over 2.4 billion workers are likely to be exposed to excessive heat at some point during their work.

This is an increase of 34.7 per cent in exposure estimates in the 20-year period between 2000 and 2020, according to the report, titled Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate released on 22 April, 2024.

The report attributed this rise to a combination of factors, with rising global temperatures due to climate change being a primary culprit. Additionally, the global workforce itself is growing, leading to a larger number of people exposed to dangerous heat conditions.

When calculated as a share of the global workforce, the proportion increased to 70.9 per cent from 65.5 per cent in the last 20 years, ILO said.

Much of 2023 saw a record-breaking trend of rising temperatures. The trend seems to be continuing in 2024. According to the World Meteorological Organization, January 2024 was the hottest January ever recorded. It was also the eighth consecutive month to set a record for being the warmest for that specific month.

In a country like India, where 90 per cent of the labour force is engaged in the informal sector, performing outdoor jobs that involve physically demanding tasks in agriculture, construction, brick kilns, and other similar fields, workers face risks due to heat stress, given their frequent exposure to extreme heat at work.

Workplace heat stress refers to the excess heat load a worker can be exposed to due to different contributing factors, acting alone or in combination. These include environmental conditions, such as air temperature and humidity, and heat sources from industrial settings, for example, heat-emitting sources and machinery.

he impact of climate change on workers goes well beyond exposure to excessive heat, creating a "cocktail of hazards", which result in a range of dangerous health conditions.

In hot, rural regions like in India and African and West Asia countries, epidemics of chronic kidney disease of unknown aetiology are affecting large numbers of workers conducting heavy manual labour. A high number of agricultural workers have begun dying from irreversible kidney failure, the report noted.

Citing another study, the ILO report highlighted that maintaining a core body temperature of around 37 degrees Celsius is essential for continued normal body function. If the body temperature rises above 38°C, physical and cognitive functions are impaired. If it rises above 40.6°C, the risk of organ damage, loss of consciousness and, ultimately, death increases sharply.

Around 18,970 lives and 2.09 million disability-adjusted life years were lost annually due to the 22.87 million occupational injuries, which are attributable to excessive heat.

—Downtoearth

If body temperature rises above 38°C, physical, cognitive functions are impaired ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Without voters ID, Vrindavan's widows are forgotten this polls

- NGOs working in the area estimate that the number of widows living here could be between 10,000 and 12,000 and they are mostly from West Bengal

Widows at an ashram in Vrindavan, a group largely without voter IDs ***PHOTO: PTI***

The buzz of electioneering stops where the quiet of their lives begin. Thousands of women, known simply as the 'Widows of Vrindavan', have been relegated to the margins even in the noisy, participative general elections with little interest in a group largely without voter IDs.

The women, mostly in their 60s and 70s, have taken refuge in this temple town, abandoned by their families and left with virtually no identity – other than being banded together as women whose husbands have died. Crowded together in dirty rooms and earning about Rs 20 a day, or even less, singing bhajans, there are no promises for them this election season.

And while most are resigned to their fate, some still fight it.

Like Gayatri Mukherjee who regrets she does not have voting rights despite being a citizen of India.

Mukherjee lost her husband and her only daughter to cancer and came to Vrindavan after repaying the loan taken from their treatment

"I voted in every election in Kolkata. I am a citizen of this country and I feel that I should also take part in this festival of democracy. Perhaps this is not possible now, so what will be the point of mourning," said the politically aware 67-year-old.

Anita Das, also abandoned by her family, knows an election is around the corner but has come to stoically accept that there is nothing for women like her.

"I am 80 now. I tried but now at this age what will I do even after getting recognition as a voter. It is better to spend my last moments peacefully taking Krishna's name rather than wandering from door-to-door," she told PTI while waiting for her turn to sing in a temple.

"I know that elections are happening. The condition of Bengal is also serious but I want to live peacefully here. There is no interest left neither in casting vote nor in getting Voter ID made."

Das came to Vrindavan from Kolkata after the death of her husband 17 years ago and has spent a major part of her widowed life in the bylanes of Vrindavan, which falls in the Mathura Lok Sabha constituency.

Mahananda, who came here 15 years ago after she couldn't live on at her home in Maharashtra because of her daughter-in-law's harassment after her husband's death, said, "I have an Aadhar card but do not have a voter ID. Who do I ask to get it made?"

In the world's biggest festival of democracy when politicians across parties are trying to attract the voters, the widows, without any social capital, find they have no political capital either because most are not registered voters.

Their stories find echo in every corner of the narrow streets of Vrindavan, Radhakund and Govardhan where the women in white sarees are either found begging, standing outside a temple waiting for 'bhandara' (free food), or singing bhajans for hours for a meagre Rs 20.

Many have accepted political indifference as their destiny, coming to terms with the fact that they are not voters and therefore don't matter. They comprise less than one per cent of the more than 18 lakh voters in constituency.

Although there is no official figure, NGOs working in the area estimate that the number of widows living here could be between 10,000 and 12,000 and they are mostly from West Bengal. With limited resources, it is difficult for the women to clear the many hurdles to a voter card.

"Now women are coming here not only from Bengal but also from states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh. I get 25 to 30 calls every day. We are taking care of 400 women but a much larger number are those who are compelled to live on the streets," she said.

"Only five to seven per cent of these might have a voter ID. We got Aadhar cards made, many bank accounts were also opened but now we are tired of visiting government offices for voter IDs. It doesn't matter to anyone whether they vote or not," she added.

Most of the widows are unwilling to move too far from the town because it will keep them from accessing the Krishna temples and their everyday routine of 'darshan' and 'bhajans'.

BJP MP from the area Hema Malini agreed that the widows are reluctant to move from where they are.

"We care for them and that's why we built Krishna Kutir in 2018 with all modern facilities. But it's difficult to convince them to stay there. They want to live where they are living. What can we do?" she asked.

Some found places in private or government ashrams but most of them share cramped and dirty rented rooms. They get a token for singing bhajans in the city of temples and after singing bhajans for four hours, they get Rs 10 with tea and one meal. You also have to wait for a long time for your turn to sing bhajans.

The Mathura Lok Sabha constituency is set to hold elections on 26 April during Phase 2 of the voting schedule. Two-time MP and actor Hema Malini will face competition from Mukesh Dhangar of the Congress and Suresh Singh of the BSP.

As politicians across the spectrum woo voters, these are the women left out. Many say they have accepted their fate and have nothing but an anonymous death in the bylanes of Brijbhoomi.

—PTI

PHOTO: REPRESENTATION

Japan plane with 200 flyers emits smoke, lands safely

TOKYO, 24 APRIL

Smoke was seen coming from an All Nippon Airways plane as it landed safely at Shin Chitose airport in northern Japan on Wednesday, public broadcaster NHK reported. The ANA flight from Tokyo was carrying about 200 people and no injuries were reported, NHK said. The smoke, coming from the wing area, subsided when the engines stopped, it said. In January, a Japan Airlines flight and a coast guard plane collided and burst into flames at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. All 379 passengers and crew members were evacuated from the JAL plane and survived. The pilot of the coast guard plane was injured and five crew members were killed. *—PTI*

Pak security forces kill 3 terrorists in Balochistan

BALOCHISTAN, 24 APRIL

Three terrorists have been shot dead by security forces in an Intelligence-based Operation (IBO) in Pakistan's Balochistan, Dawn reported, citing the military's media wing. The incident took place in Balochistan's Pishin district on Tuesday. The operation took place last night on the reported presence of terrorists in the area. Pakistan stated that a large cache of arms, ammunition and explosives was also recovered during the operation, reported Dawn. Moreover, two alleged terrorists were also killed and several were injured in a gun battle with security forces in the district a day ago. The officials said that the local administration received information about the presence of terrorists in the Sanzalai mountain range of Pishin, following which an operation was planned. Pakistan claimed that the terrorists crossed into Pishin from Afghanistan. *—PTI*

China to send 3 astronauts to Tiangong space stn

JIUQUAN, 24 APRIL

China's space agency is making final preparations to send the Shenzhou-18 crew into low-Earth orbit on Thursday as part of its ambitious space program that aims to put people on the moon by 2030. In a press conference on Wednesday, the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) introduced the three astronauts; Commander Ye Guangfu, 43, a veteran astronaut who was part of the Shenzhou-13 mission in 2021; and astronauts Li Cong, 34, and Li Guangsu, 36, who will go to space for the first time. The three-member crew's spacecraft is set for lift-off at 12.59pm from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center on the edge of the Gobi Desert. *—PTI*

7 teens arrested for Sydney bishop's stabbing

SYDNEY, 24 APRIL

Australian police arrested seven teenagers accused of following a violent extremist ideology in raids across Sydney on Wednesday to protect the community from a potential attack, officials said. The seven, aged 15 to 17, were part of a network that included a 16-year-old boy accused of the stabbing of a bishop in a Sydney church on 15 April, police said. Five other teenagers were still being questioned late Wednesday by the Joint Counter-Terrorism Team, which includes federal and state police as well as the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the nation's main domestic spy agency, and the New South Wales Crime Commission, which specialises in extremists and organised crime. More than 400 police officers executed 13 search warrants at properties across southwest Sydney. *—PTI*

US passes $95B aid for Ukraine & Israel

The bill was passed by 79-18 vote after months

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

After months of delay, the Senate successfully passed a USD 95 billion package aimed at providing aid to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan, CNN reported.

The bipartisan effort marks a victory for President Joe Biden, congressional Democrats, and Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell, who has been a staunch advocate for supporting Ukraine despite increasing reluctance from some within his own party.

The bill passed the Senate in an overwhelming 79-18 vote late on Tuesday after the House had approved the foreign package on Saturday.

The comprehensive package, which now awaits Biden's signature, bundles together four bills that had previously faced hurdles in both chambers of Congress. This legislative feat follows a rare Saturday session in the House, where nearly USD 61 billion in aid for Ukraine, over USD 26 billion for Israel, and more than USD 8 billion for the Indo-Pacific were approved.

House Speaker Mike Johnson faced challenges from conservatives within his own party who opposed sending aid to Ukraine. However, after bipartisan negotiations, the legislation ultimately received broad support in the House.

The path to delivering aid to Ukraine and Israel had been fraught with obstacles, as House and Senate Republicans initially insisted on addressing border security concerns before proceeding with foreign aid. Former President Donald Trump's opposition to the final deal further complicated negotiations, leading Republicans to discard the border package.

McConnell emphasised the importance of upholding American leadership and global responsibilities, describing the Senate's action as "overdue" and "a test, and we must not fail it." *—AP*

The comprehensive package now awaits President Joe Biden's signature
PHOTO: X/@AAWSAT_ENG

Dangerous situation: China blasts US aid to Taiwan

BEIJING, 24 APRIL

China on Wednesday blasted the latest package of US military assistance to Taiwan on Wednesday, saying that such funding was pushing the self-governing island republic into a "dangerous situation."

The US Senate late Tuesday passed USD 95 billion in war aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. The package included USD 8 billion for Taiwan, meant to counter the threat of invasion by China, which claims the entire island as its own territory. The mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office said the aid "seriously violates" US commitments to China and "sends a wrong signal to the Taiwan independence separatist forces.

Office spokesperson Zhu Fenglian added that Taiwan's ruling pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party is willing to "become a pawn for external forces to use Taiwan to contain China, bringing Taiwan into a dangerous situation."

On Tuesday, Taiwan's President-elect Lai Ching-te told a visiting US Congressional delegation that the aid package would "strengthen the deterrence against authoritarianism in the West Pacific ally chain" and "help ensure peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and also boost confidence in the region." *—AP*

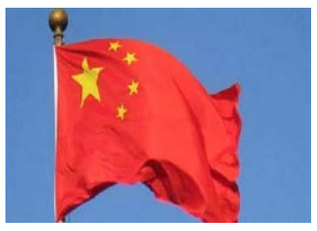


PHOTO: PTI

PTI DENIES 'SECRET TALKS' WITH ESTABLISHMENTS

ISLAMABAD, 24 APRIL

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has said that the party has no interest in engaging in discussions with anyone, firmly denying any rumours of secret negotiations with the powerful establishment.

"Today, I asked the party's founding chairman Imran if some institutions had contacted him for the talks. Imran clearly said that no one had contacted him," PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan told reporters outside Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on Tuesday.

He said no one had even contacted him for dialogue, nor had he received any message for talks from anyone, Gohar Khan was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper on Wednesday.

Gohar's clarification came days after it was reported in a section of the media that Imran Khan had revealed that some PTI leaders were still in contact with the establishment (the military).

Gohar made it clear that whenever PTI is interested in dialogues, they would be held openly and the media would be informed about it. *—PTI*

Imran Khan ***PHOTO: PTI***

US students fight against colleges' FINANCIAL TIES WITH ISRAEL

Thousands of US college students are protesting against business deals between varsities and Israel, which is continuing its assault on Gaza. At least 100 Columbia University students were arrested on Tuesday. Following this, students have now pitched tents with 'Free Gaza' placards and are pledging to stay put until their demands are met. In six months, Israel has killed at least 34,000 Palestinians.

WHAT DO THE STUDENTS WANT?

- Varsities must stop business with military weapon makers supplying arms to Israel
- Stop accepting research money from Israel
- Stop investing college endowments with Israeli money managers
- Be transparent about what money is received from Israel and why
- Students at Columbia, Harvard Law, Rutgers and American universities have passed resolutions calling for an end to investments and academic partnerships with Israel

HOW MUCH MONEY ARE THE VARSITIES RECEIVING?

US requires colleges to report gifts and contracts from foreign sources, but there have been problems with underreporting. Colleges allegedly steer money through separate foundations working for them. Reportedly, about 100 US colleges have reported gifts or contracts from Israel, totalling $375M over 20 years. MIT students have exposed researchers who accept money from Israel for drone navigation and missile protection projects. MIT has also accepted USD 11 million from defence ministry over the past decade. University of Michigan students say school sends USD 6 billion to investment managers who profit from Israeli companies

HOW ARE UNIVERSITIES RESPONDING?

Universities' officials say they want to talk to students and honour their right to protest. However, they say they are concerned about Jewish students being affected by alleged 'anti-Semitic' speeches

Students protest in support of Palestinians on Columbia University campus ***PHOTO: X/@ArielleLAngel***

Iran Prez opens $514M Lanka hydropower unit

Iran President Ebrahim Raisi with Sri Lanka PM Dinesh Gunawardena in Mattala on Wednesday ***Photo: Sri Lanka President's Office via AP***

COLOMBO, 24 APRIL

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi on Wednesday inaugurated a USD 514 million hydropower project in the southeastern region of Sri Lanka which was partly funded by Tehran and was long-delayed due to international sanctions on the oil-rich nation.

This was the first visit by an Iranian President to Sri Lanka since an April 2008 visit by its then-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

During the inauguration, Raisi said Tehran was happy to assist the Uma Oya Multipurpose Development Project (UOMDP) to forge closer ties between the people of Iran and Sri Lanka. Iranian engineers worked on the project to see its success.

Wickremesinghe in his address said he looks forward to Sri Lanka and Iran making joint progress as members of the Global South. He said Sri Lanka is grateful to Iran for the technical support provided to UMODP, the second-largest irrigation project in the island after the Mahaweli River diversion project in the 1980s. According to a press release issued by the Sri Lankan government, the UMODP project costing USD 514 million was kicked off with USD 50 million provided by Iran.

The Sri Lankan government and Farab Energy and Water Projects (Farab Company) of Iran agreed in April 2008 to implement the project. The total contract sum amounted to USD 514 million and the Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) funded USD 50 million until 2013.

However, due to international sanctions imposed on Iran later that year, Tehran was unable to continue providing funds for the project. Subsequently, Sri Lanka decided to proceed with the project using government funds. *—AP*

N KOREA SENDS DELEGATION TO IRAN FOR TALKS

SEOUL, 24 APRIL

A high-level North Korean economic delegation was on its way to Iran, the North's state media said Wednesday, for what would be the two countries' first known talks since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Embracing the idea of a "new Cold War," North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is pushing to build up cooperation with countries confronting the United States, as his intensified weapons tests prompted the US and South Korea to expand their military drills.

Pyongyang's delegation led by Yun Jung Ho, North Korea's minister of external economic relations, flew out Tuesday for the trip to Iran, official Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday.

State media did not immediately provide further details.

Pyongyang and Tehran are among the few governments in the world that support Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and both have been accused of providing Russia with military equipment. *—AP*

US to 'sanction' Iranian ally nations

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

The US has warned of a "potential risk of sanctions" for anyone considering a business deal with Iran. This was after a day after Pakistan and Iran inked several agreements during Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi's maiden visit to Islamabad to boost bilateral cooperation.

The latest warning comes days after the US imposed sanctions on suppliers to Pakistan's ballistic missile programme, including three companies from China even as the US also said it maintains good relations with Pakistan and described it as "an important security partner in the region."

During Raisi's three-day visit that concluded on Wednesday, Iran and Pakistan signed eight MoUs while vowing to increase trade to USD 10 billion in the coming years.

Vedant Patel, Deputy Spokesperson of the US State Department, was asked about the agreements signed during Raisi's visit and Pakistan's assertion that it does not need a waiver from US sanctions to build Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline. Pakistani Foreign Ministry had told: "It is a segment of the pipeline which is being built inside Pakistani territory. So, we do not believe that at this point there is room for any discussion or waiver from a third party." *—PTI*

Russian priest who held Navalny's memorial suspended

MOSCOW, 24 APRIL

A priest who oversaw a memorial for late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been suspended for three years by the head of the country's Orthodox Church.

Dmitry Safronov held a memorial service by Navalny's grave in Moscow on 26 March to mark 40 days since the politician's death, an important ritual within Russian Orthodox tradition.

An order published Tuesday on the Moscow diocese website publicly demoted Safronov from his position as priest to that of a psalm-reader and stripped him of the right to give blessings or to wear a cassock for the next three years. He was also transferred to another church within the capital. No reason was given for the decision, which was signed by Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a key ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Navalny died suddenly on 16 February in the remote Arctic penal colony where he had been serving a 19-year sentence on extremism charges widely seen as politically motivated. The cause of Navalny's death remains unexplained, although the politician's allies have blamed the Kremlin for his demise. *—PTI*

An order published on the Moscow diocese website publicly demoted Safronov from his position ***PHOTO: X/@TVPWORLD_COM***

CONTENT CREATORS HIT

US passes divest-or-ban bill on TikTok

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

The Senate passed legislation Tuesday that would force TikTok's China-based parent company to sell the social media platform under the threat of a ban.

This was a contentious move by US lawmakers that's expected to face legal challenges and disrupt the lives of content creators who rely on the short-form video app for income.

The TikTok legislation was included as part of a larger $95 billion package that provides foreign aid to Ukraine and Israel and was passed 79-18. It now goes to President Joe Biden, said a statement.

A decision made by House Republicans last week to attach the TikTok bill to the high-priority package helped expedite its passage in Congress and came after negotiations with the Senate, where an earlier version of the bill had stalled.

That version had given TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, six months to divest its stakes in the platform. But it drew skepticism from some key lawmakers concerned it was too short of a window for a complex deal that could be worth tens of billions of dollars.

The revised legislation extends the deadline, giving ByteDance nine months to sell TikTok, and a possible three-month extension if a sale is in progress. The bill would also bar the company from controlling TikTok's secret sauce: the algorithm that feeds users videos based on their interests and has made the platform a trendsetting phenomenon.

TikTok did not immediately return a request for comment Tuesday night.

The passage of the legislation is a culmination of long-held bipartisan fears in Washington over Chinese threats and the ownership of TikTok, which is used by 170 million Americans. For years, lawmakers and administration officials have expressed concerns that Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over U.S. user data, or influence Americans by suppressing or promoting certain content on TikTok.

"Congress is not acting to punish ByteDance, TikTok or any other individual company," Senate Commerce Committee Chairwoman Maria Cantwell said.

"Congress is acting to prevent foreign adversaries from conducting espionage, surveillance, maligned operations, harming vulnerable Americans, our servicemen and women, and our US government personnel." Opponents of the bill say the Chinese government could easily get information on Americans in other ways, including through commercial data brokers that traffic in personal information. *—AP*

US attached the TikTok bill to the high-priority funding package, which helped expedite its passage in Congress ***PHOTO: X/@WTOP***

Rupee trades in narrow range against US dollar

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

The rupee was trading in a narrow range against the US dollar in early trade on Wednesday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by strong American currency. Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices and significant foreign fund outflows in the international market dented investors' sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.29, registering a gain of 2 paise from its previous close. In initial trade, the local unit also saw a low of 83.32 against the American currency. The rupee is expected to see range-bound trade between 83.20 to 83.40 on Wednesday, Bhansali added. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,044.54 crore, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

Gold, silver prices rebound after falling for two sessions

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Gold and silver prices rebounded on Wednesday after falling in the past two sessions, with the yellow metal rising Rs 410 to Rs 72,610 per 10 grams in the local market due to strong trends in the global markets. Silver prices also jumped Rs 250 to Rs 83,750 per kg. According to HDFC Securities, gold prices bounced Rs 410 to Rs 72,610 per 10 grams in Delhi. The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,200 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Silver prices also rose Rs 250 to Rs 83,750 per kg. In the previous close, it had settled at Rs 83,500 per kg. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,322 per ounce, up USD 12 from the previous close. Silver was also trading higher at USD 27.10 per ounce. It had ended at USD 26.80 per ounce in the previous session *—PTI*

PayU gets RBI nod to work as payment aggregator

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Fintech firm PayU has received an in-principle approval from the Reserve Bank to operate as a payment aggregator, the company said on Wednesday. In January 2023, RBI had returned applications of Prosus Group firm PayU and asked it to resubmit them within 120 days. With in-principle approval in place, PayU can now onboard new merchants to provide them digital payment services. "This license is pivotal in our mission to establish a globally renowned digital payment infrastructure rooted in India. Aligned with the government's Digital India initiative and the RBI's forward-thinking regulations, we are dedicated to driving digitisation and financial inclusion, particularly for small merchants," said Anirban Mukherjee, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), PayU. *—PTI*

ICICI Prudential shares tank nearly 7 pc after earnings

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Shares of ICICI Prudential on Wednesday declined nearly 7 per cent after the company reported a 26 per cent drop in net profit for the quarter ended 31 March. The stock dipped 6.73 per cent to Rs 553.15 on the BSE. On the NSE, it went lower 6.24 per cent to Rs 556.75. ICICI Prudential on Tuesday reported a 26 per cent drop in net profit to Rs 174 crore for the quarter ended March 31 on higher expenses. The private sector insurer had a profit of Rs 235 crore in the fourth quarter of 2022-23. The insurer's net premium income rose 17 per cent to Rs 14,788 crore in the March quarter compared to Rs 12,629 crore in the year-ago period. The company's expenses of management rose 10 per cent to Rs 2,550 crore in the fourth quarter of FY24, from Rs 2,320 crore at the end of the March quarter of 2022-23. For the full 2023-24 fiscal, ICICI Pru's net profit rose 5 per cent to Rs 852 crore. In 2022-23 fiscal, the net profit was Rs 811 crore.*—PTI*

Markets maintain momentum for 4th day

Sensex climbed 114.49 points to settle at 73,952

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

From the Sensex basket, JSW steel, NTPC were among gainers *PHOTO: PTI*

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ticked higher for the fourth straight session on Wednesday, helped by buying in metal and commodity stocks amid a positive trend in global equities. However, intense selling pressure on telecom, IT and tech counters capped the upside, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 114.49 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 73,852.94. During the day, it jumped 383.16 points or 0.51 per cent to 74,121.61.

The NSE Nifty advanced 34.40 points or 0.15 per cent to 22,402.40.

The indices witnessed some selling pressure towards the fag-end of the session that erased some initial gains. India's economic activity continued to expand in April, driven by services and manufacturing sectors. The HSBC flash India Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) climbed to 62.2 in April against March's final reading of 61.8.

From the Sensex basket, JSW Steel, Tata Steel, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, NTPC and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Maruti, Reliance Industries and Titan were among the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.79 per cent and midcap index advanced 0.92 per cent. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European markets were trading mostly with gains. Wall Street ended with gains on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.35 per cent to USD 88.11 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,044.54 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

On Tuesday The BSE benchmark ended 89.83 points or 0.12 per cent higher at 73,738.45.

Trimming most of its early gains, the NSE Nifty ended 31.60 points or 0.14 per cent up at 22,368. *—PTI*

NSE INTRODUCES DERIVATIVES ON NIFTY NEXT 50 FROM TODAY

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) to start derivatives on Nifty Next 50 Index (NIFTYNXT50) from today. Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has approved derivatives on the Nifty Next 50 Index on NSE.

Derivative contracts are short-term financial instruments that come with a fixed expiry date. The underlying asset can be stocks, commodities, currencies, indices, exchange rates, or even interest rates.

NSE, the world's No. 1 derivatives exchange in the year 2023 based on contracts traded, will offer three serial monthly index futures and index options contract cycles.

The Nifty Next 50 index has a 71 per cent correlation and a Beta value of 0.95 with the Nifty 50 Index.

It has a correlation of 90 per cent with Nifty Midcap 150 index. In recent years, NSE has introduced derivatives on Nifty Midcap Select Index (MIDCPNIFTY) in January 2022 and derivatives on the Nifty Financial Services index (FINNIFTY) in January 2020 in the equity derivatives segment and multiple products in the commodity derivatives segment. *—ANI*

India's pharma exports rise 10 pc to USD 27.9 billion

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

The country's drugs and pharmaceuticals exports increased 9.67 per cent year-on-year to USD 27.9 billion in 2023-24, even as the total exports dipped by 3 per cent in the last fiscal.

According to the commerce ministry data, pharma exports in March grew by 12.73 per cent to USD 2.8 billion. The top five export markets, for the sector during the last fiscal, are the US, the UK, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil.

The US accounts for over 31 per cent of India's total pharma exports, followed by the UK and Netherlands (about 3 per cent each).

In 2023-24, the outbound shipments also entered new geographies like Montenegro, South Sudan, Chad, Comoros, Brunei, Latvia, Ireland, Chad, Sweden, Haiti and Ethiopia.

An industry expert said that increasing market opportunities and healthy demand in countries like the US are helping exports to record healthy growth rates month after month.

Experts have said that India's pharmaceutical business may exceed USD 130 billion by 2030, supported by expanding market opportunities and heightened demand in the overseas markets. The business stood at over USD 50 billion for the 2022-23.

On average, India exports pharma products worth USD 2-3 billion every month.

India's pharmaceutical industry is the third largest by volume and the 13th largest by value in the world, producing more than 60,000 generic drugs across 60 therapeutic categories.

The government has rolled out two production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes to promote domestic manufacturing of key pharmaceutical ingredients and generic medicines. *—PTI*

LIC cautions public against misleading ads

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) on Wednesday cautioned the public against certain individuals/entities engaging in fraudulent advertising practices on social media platforms by misusing the image of senior officials and the brand name and logo of the company.

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), LIC asked its policyholders and the public to exercise caution and verify the authenticity of any such advertisements.

"It has come to our attention that certain individuals and/or entities are engaging in fraudulent advertising practices on various social media platforms by misusing the image of our senior official/s or ex-officials, our brand logo, and our brand name without our consent in an unauthorised manner. We wish to alert the public in regard to such deceptive activities," LIC said in a public caution notice.

It asked the public to report URL links of such fraudulent advertisements on LIC's official social media accounts.

"We will pursue appropriate legal action and those found engaging in fraudulent activities using our brand without authorisation," LIC said, adding that it is committed to ensuring that policyholders and general public are not misled by such deceptive advertising practices. *—PTI*

CRISIL RATINGS

'IT sector staring at 2nd straight year of muted revenue growth'

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

Crisil ratings said the growth would be 5-7 per cent in FY25 *PHOTO: PTI*

The Indian IT services sector is staring at a second consecutive year of muted revenue growth due to modest increase in tech spends in Europe and the US, a domestic rating agency said on Wednesday.

Crisil Ratings said it expects the sector to grow at 5-7 per cent in FY25, after a growth of 6 per cent estimated to have been achieved in FY24.

The overall industry size is pegged at USD 250 billion and it creates over 50 lakh direct jobs. The industry is, however, expected to sustain in the key metric of profitability, as the operating profit margins will be stable at 22-23 per cent, the agency said, attributing it to prudent management of employee costs.

Manufacturing and healthcare, which contribute a tenth of the revenue, were the only bright spots and continued double-digit growth in tech spend given the focus on process automation and research and development-based analytics, especially in healthcare.

As revenue growth remained subdued, IT service companies pulled back on addition of fresh talent, resulting in headcount reductions by 4 per cent in 2023 by top 12 companies.

This, along with the decline in attrition to 13 per cent as of December 2023 from the high of 20 per cent in FY23 provided a breather by limiting higher-cost replacement hiring during FY24, it said.

Players will continue to eye acquisitions, especially small and mid-sized opportunities that could enhance their product baskets and increase digital capabilities, it said. *—PTI*

Welspun Corp gets Rs 611 cr order in Latin America

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Welspun Corp on Wednesday said it has secured an international order worth Rs 611 crore to supply pipes and other items. It has received a binding Letter of Award (LoA) for supply of LSAW (Longitudinally Submerged Arc Welded) pipes, coating and bends in Latin America, Welspun Corp said in an exchange filing. The execution of the contract shall be done in ongoing 2024-25 fiscal year, the company said. Welspun Group is one of the largest manufacturers. *—PTI*

Govt not seeking to change SC ruling on spectrum allocation

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

The next auction of spectrum for telecom is due in June *PHOTO: PTI*

The government is not seeking to change the 2012 Supreme Court judgement that backed auction as the preferred mode of allocating telecom spectrum except for narrowly defined sectors such as satellite communication and defence where the auction is not feasible, a top source said on Wednesday.

The petition, which was filed prior to the Parliament passing the new telecom law that provides for 19 exemptions in late December, came up for hearing on Monday.

The source termed it as "strange" the row that erupted following the petition coming up before the court.

The government is being questioned if it wants to change the 2G judgement but the fact is that because of a history of litigation in the telecom sector, the miscellaneous application was filed in the best interest of maintaining transparency, explaining what is intended to be done.

The administrative allocation route will provide significant relief to space telecommunications service providers such as Elon Musk's Starlink, Bharti Airtel's OneWeb, and Amazons Project Kuiper, as they can obtain spectrum without going through an auction process.

The next auction of spectrum for telecom is due in June this year. *—PTI*

- The administrative allocation route will provide significant relief to space telecommunications service providers such as Elon Musk's Starlink, Bharti Airtel's OneWeb, as they can obtain spectrum without going through an auction process

Jaipur becomes major contributor for investments

JAIPUR, 24 APRIL

After the signing of the bilateral trade agreement between India and UAE, the bilateral trade between both countries has registered a 16 per cent increase reaching 85 billion USD from 73 billion USD two years ago. Officials from the UAE and India highlighted the significant economic opportunities arising from the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries.

Emphasising on the importance of Jaipur in facilitating trade between the UAE and India, amounting to approximately half a billion dollars, the UAE officials expressed the intention to engage with local businesses in Jaipur to explore partnership opportunities with UAE counterparts.

UAE's Ras Al-Khaimah was also highlighted as an important location for the business leaders of India for its economic investment policies and infrastructure.

As both countries continue to deepen their partnership, businesses stand to gain from the conducive regulatory framework and enhanced market access facilitated by the agreement. *—ANI*

60 pc of funds allocated to PM SVANidhi utilised: RTI

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

PM SVANidhi
Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi

PHOTO: PTI

Over 60 per cent of the funds (Rs 2096.49 crore) allocated to the PM SVANidhi scheme has been utilised as of March 31, revealed the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in response to an RTI query.

Prime Minister Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi, which was launched in June 2020, has extended more than 84.51 lakh loans till April 23, as per the real-time data on SVANidhi website. Out of which, over 30.11 lakh loans have been repaid so far.

The fruits and vegetable sector has the highest uptake of loans under the scheme, revealed the RTI reply.

As per the reply to the RTI query filed by ANI, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs informed:

So far, over 1.07 crore applications have been submitted for loans in three categories.

The scheme provides collateral-free working capital loans of up to Rs 10,000 for a one-year term, with subsequent loans of Rs 20,000 and Rs 50,000 at a 7 percent interest subsidy. The scheme also provides incentives for timely loan repayment and encourages digital payments with a monthly cashback of up to Rs 100. *—ANI*

- The fruits and vegetable sector has the highest uptake of loans under the scheme, revealed the RTI reply. So far, over 1.07 crore applications have been submitted for loans in three categories

TILL 4TH JULY

Accreditation of halal certification deadline extended

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

In India, halal industry is still in its infancy *PHOTO: PTI*

The government has extended the deadline for accreditation of halal certification bodies and registration of export units by three months till 4 July this year.

Last year, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) had notified the policy conditions for halal certification process for meat and meat products and had directed the existing bodies to seek accreditation from National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) for i-CAS (Indian Conformity Assessment Scheme) Halal till 5 April, 2024.

DGFT is an arm of the commerce ministry which deals with exports and import-related issues.

Products covered under the notification include meat of bovine animals, fish and chilled meat of sheep and goats; and sausages and similar meat products.

To streamline the certification of meat and meat products as halal from the country, 'India Conformity Assessment Scheme (i-CAS)' has been developed.

Earlier, there was no mandatory halal certification system in India regulated by the government as the country does not have a national regulation for the certification.

The global halal food market was USD 1,978 billion in 2021. The market is projected to reach USD 3,907.7 billion by 2027.

In India, the country's halal industry is still in its infancy. There are no specific labelling requirements for halal food products imported to India.

Halal certification is given by many private companies in the country, marking the food or products as permissible.

The major halal-certifying organisations in the country include Halal India Pvt Ltd and Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind Halal Trust. The International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF) is an international network of accreditation bodies mandated to enforce halal standards in their economies.

Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, the UAE, and Pakistan, have their own halal standards. However, so far there have been no global halal standards.

The rapid growth of the halal industry has not only led to the halal technologies and innovations but also halal-related laws and regulations that are still not harmonised globally. *—PTI*

- Earlier, there was no mandatory halal certification system regulated by the government as the country does not have a national regulation for the certification

Rampant SRH eye another run-fest against RCB

RCB batters have worked hard to make up in bowling

HYDERABAD, 24 APRIL

Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to unleash their brute batting power on struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru when the two teams face off in their return-leg fixture of the IPL here on Thursday.

Having breached the 250-run mark thrice in this IPL edition itself, Sunrisers Hyderabad are pushing the boundaries of T20 batting with their no-holds-barred approach.

While Mumbai Indians were the first victim of SRH's newfound batting strength this season, RCB bore the maximum brunt when the Travis Head-led batting line-up powered the 2016 winners to IPL's highest-ever total of 287/3 in Bengaluru.

If this was not enough, SRH's carnage against Delhi Capitals — which included a record 125/0 being scored in the powerplay — brought forth the possibility of the 300-run mark being breached for the first time in the IPL.

And it won't be surprising if SRH manages to do the unthinkable and that too against a bowling attack as frail as RCB's, whose struggles within the bowling department could be gauged by the fact that their best bowler, Yash Dayal, is at 24th spot in the overall list with seven wickets. Placed at the bottom of the pool, RCB have conceded at least 180 in their last five matches. In the last two games, the opponents have raked up totals over 200.

RCB batters have worked hard to make up for their severe shortcomings in bowling, but for such a lopsided squad in terms of balance, the task of producing an all-round performance looks nearly impossible.

To their credit, RCB fought incredibly hard with the bat but were unfortunate to have lost to Kolkata Knight Riders by a mere one run after conceding 222/6. Moreover, a collective batting effort must have pleased the RCB management to a large extent. *—PTI*

Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to unleash their brute batting power on struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru **PHOTO: PTI**

- Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to unleash their brute batting power on struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru when the two teams face off in their return-leg fixture of the IPL here on Thursday.

He was a victim of a contentious call but Virat Kohli remains RCB's best batter in the tournament so far, having scored 379 runs to keep the Orange Cap in possession.

But hot on his heels are a few others including SRH's Head, who is making most of his purple patch. Head's game is designed not only on aggressiveness and ability to cash in on every opportunity but his ability to find gaps at will makes him a compulsory watch. Abhishek Sharma has flourished in Head's company and Heinrich Klaasen too has made merry with the bat this

PHOTO: PTI

Sreeshankar undergoes knee surgery in Doha

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Star Indian long jumper Murali Sreeshankar has undergone surgery on his injured knee that ruled him out of the Paris Olympics in July-August. The 25-year-old, who is a silver medallist at the Asian and Commonwealth Games, underwent the surgery in Doha. "The surgery was successful under Dr. Bruno Olory at the Aspetar Hospital, Doha. Thank you everyone for all your love and blessings during this tough phase. 18 hours post surgery and I am already walking," wrote Sreeshankar on Instagram.Dr Olory is a French orthopedic surgeon. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Football: Devi set to be national women's coach

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Former player Langam Chaoba Devi is set to take over as the national women's football coach after the I M Vijayan-led AIFF technical committee recommended her name for the position on Wednesday. The 51-year-old Devi, who captained the national side in the 1999 Asian Championships in the Philippines, had earlier been an assistant coach of the Indian team. The Manipuri has also represented the country in the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games. "After extensive deliberations, the committee recommended Ms. Langam Chaoba Devi as the head coach of the Indian senior women's national team," the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said in a statement. *—PTI*

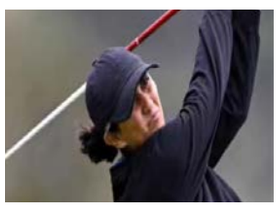


PHOTO: AFP

Indian golfers Aditi and Diksha set to participate in Paris

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

C Indian golfers Aditi Ashok (46) and Diksha Dagar (138) are set to participate in the Paris Olympics whereas Shubhankar Sharma (197) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (232) also have a strong chance of making it to the Games. While it will be a third appearance for Aditi at the Olympics which is also the most for an Indian, Diksha will be competing for the second time. For Sharma and Bhullar, it would be their maiden appearance. *—PTI*

Trying to find a batting combination of IPL: Fleming

CHENNAI, 24 APRIL

Chennai Super Kings are not looking for a"quick fix" to their issues in the batting department, and head coachStephen Fleming is ready to give the likes of Daryl Mitchell time to getsettled in the top three after their fourth loss in eight games.CSK has been juggling batters in the top three throughout theseason. On Tuesday against Lucknow Super Giants, Ajinkya Rahane and RuturajGaikwad came to open while Mitchell was promoted to number three from five. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD vs RCB

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, Hyderabad

Axar, Pant power Delhi Capitals to 224/4

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Skipper Rishabh Pant and Axar Patel forged a blistering century stand en route to quickfire individual half-centuries to power Delhi Capitals to a solid 224 for 4 against Gujarat Titans in an IPL match here on Wednesday.

Pant and Axar stitched 113 off just 68 balls for the fourth wicket with their counter-attacking batting after DC was down 44 for 3 in 6 overs.

While Pant led from the front, remaining unbeaten on 88 off 43 balls (5X4s, 8X6s), Axar made 66 off 43 balls studded with five fours and four sixes.

Sent into bat, Jake Fraser-McGurk and Parthiv Patel got DC off to a flying start, racing to 34 in 3 overs.

Fraser-McGurk, who smashed a blistering 18-ball 65 in their last match, looked at his ominous best as he elegantly pulled DC bowlers over the fence but his knock was cut short by Sandeep Warrier as the young Australian was holed out at square-leg by Noor Ahmed.

It was a double blow for DC in the fourth over as Shaw was caught by Noor off Warrier two balls later with a good diving effort at the deep backward square leg as the batter went for a maximum. *—PTI*

Skipper Rishabh Pant and Axar Patel **PHOTO: PTI**

ICC ROPES IN USAIN BOLT AS T20 WC AMBASSADOR

DUBAI, 24 APRIL

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday named sprint legend Usain Bolt as the ambassador of the upcoming T20 World Cup to be played in the West Indies and USA from 1 to 29 June.

Jamaica-born Bolt had created history at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing where he won the 100m, 200m, and 4x100m races in world record times.Bolt currently holds world records in the 100m, 200m, and 4x100m with times of 9.58 secs, 19.19 secs, and 36.84 secs.Bolt was delighted about his new role as the World Cup came to his home."I am thrilled to be an ambassador for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

Coming from the Caribbean where cricket is a part of life, the sport has always held a special place in my heart," Bolt said in an ICC media release.Bolt said it will be massive for cricket to find a market in the USA."While I will be supporting West Indies at the WC, getting the sport into the US is big for cricket. It's the biggest sports market in the world. *—PTI*

Usain Bolt **PHOTO: PTI**

MISSING CA CENTRAL CONTRACT

Stoinis eager to play for Australia

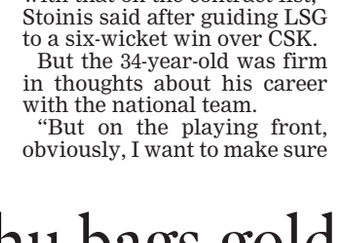
CHENNAI, 24 APRIL

Despite missing out on Cricket Australia's central contract for the 2024-25 season, all-rounder Marcus Stoinis wants to use the impact hundred against Chennai Super Kings as leverage to extend his white-ball career beyond the upcoming T20 World Cup.

Stoinis, who was not included in the 23-player central contract list, made an unbeaten 124 off 63 balls for Lucknow Super Giants here on Tuesday.

However, Stoinis didn't read much into his missing the CA contract which was announced on March 28.

"I've got a great relationship with the (Australia) coach (Andrew McDonald). Me not getting a contract, I knew that a while ago.



Marcus Stoinis **PHOTO: PTI**

"I think it is great to give younger kids a crack and let them take my spot. I'm fine with that on the contract list," Stoinis said after guiding LSG to a six-wicket win over CSK.

But the 34-year-old was firm in thoughts about his career with the national team.

"But on the playing front, obviously, I want to make sure that I'm there and that's also why it's so lucky for us and me particularly to have this competition (IPL), that's why I love it so much," he said.

The Perth-born player was omitted from Australia's ODIs against the West Indies in January, but he is set to be part of the country's T20I World Cup campaign in the West Indies and the USA in June.

Stoinis is most likely to be slotted into No. 5 in the Australian line-up during the marquee event.

Stoinis is eligible for Australian selection for the tournament because his current contract for the 2023-24 season will run its course only on 30 June. *—PTI*

Deepanshu bags gold in javelin

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Deepanshu Sharma secured the gold medal in men's javelin as Indian athletes produced a good show on the opening day of the 21st Asian U20 Athletics Championships in Dubai on Wednesday.

Deepanshu won the top prize with a throw of 70.29m, while Rohan Yadav clinched silver with a distance of 70.03m.In men's 1500m, Priyanshu claimed silver after clocking 3:50.85. Earlier, in the morning session, Ritik bagged the silver in men's discus throw, while Prachi Ankush Devkar missed bronze in women's 3000m, finishing fourth.Indian middle-distance and sprinters were also successful in heats on the opening day.

PHOTO: PTI

In women's 800m, Laxita Vinod Sandliea and Tanvi Malik sailed into the medal round in the two-lap event. In the 800m heats, Laxita was second in her heat with a time of 2:09.39, while Tanvi clocked 2:12.82 to cross the finish line in fourth place in her heat.

Anushka Dattatray Kumbhar and Sangeetha Dodla entered the medal round in the women's 400m. *—PTI*

Haaland ruled out of crucial trip to Brighton

LONDON, 23 APRIL

Manchester City's Premier League title bid has suffered a blow after Norway striker Erling Haaland was ruled out of Thursday's crucial clash at Brighton.

Haaland missed City's 1-0 win over Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley on Saturday due to a muscle injury sustained in the Champions League quarter-final exit against Real Madrid last week.

City's leading scorer, who has 20 Premier League goals this season, is yet to recover and will not make the trip to the Amex Stadium as the champions look to close the gap on leaders Arsenal.

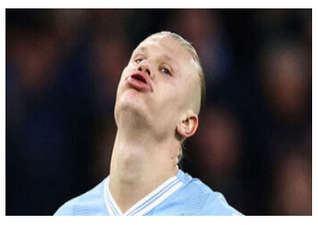
City boss Pep Guardiola insisted Haaland's injury was not serious and he could come back into contention in time for Sunday's game against Nottingham Forest.

While Haaland is sidelined, Guardiola was boosted by England internationals Phil Foden and John Stones getting the green light to face Brighton after their fitness concerns.

"Erling is not ready for tomorrow, the other two, they are ready," Guardiola told reporters on Wednesday. "I know it is not a big issue, but he is not allowed for this game."

As a gripping title race approaches the final furlong, third-placed City are four points behind leaders Arsenal, who thrashed Chelsea 5-0 on Tuesday.

Guardiola's men have two games in hand on Arsenal and have played one match less than second-placed Liverpool, who face Merseyside rivals Everton at Goodison Park on Wednesday. *—AP*



Erling Haaland **PHOTO: PTI**

EX-WRESTLER AT THE HELM

Yadav is chairman of WFI athletes' panel

VARANASI, 24 APRIL

Former Commonwealth Games gold-medallist Narsingh Pancham Yadav was elected chairman of the Wrestling Federation of India's Athletes' Commission here on Wednesday, completing a process that was mandated by the sport's world governing body.

A total of eight candidates were in fray for the seven positions and after polling, conducted on ballot paper, seven members got elected. They then chose Narsingh as chairman of the commission.

Ahead of the 2016 Olympics, the Games-bound Narsingh had grabbed headlines when two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar, who missed the qualification event due to an injury, requested for a trial bout against him.

Sushil moved the Delhi High Court and only after his appeal was rejected, it was confirmed that Narsingh would go to Rio Olympics.

Gold-medallist Narsingh Pancham Yadav **PHOTO: AFP**

- Former Commonwealth Games gold-medallist Narsingh Pancham Yadav was elected chairman of the Wrestling Federation of India's Athletes' Commission here on Wednesday, completing a process that was mandated by the sport's world governing body.

However, in a shocking turn of events, Narshingh failed two dope tests prior to the Games and was banned for four years by the Court of Arbitration for Sport even though the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) had cleared him on the plea that his failed test was the result of sabotage.

The CAS decision came a day before his opening bout, forcing him to leave Rio de Janeiro without competing. The ban came to an end in July 2020 and he has maintained that the entire episode was a case of sabotage.

The other elected members of the athletes commission were Sahil (Delhi), Smitha AS (Kerala), Bharti Bhaghei (UP), Khushboo S Pawar (Gujarat), Nikki (Haryana), and Sweta Dubey (Bengal).

United World Wrestling (UWW), the international body for the sport, while lifting suspension of WFI had stated that the move was subject to the Sanjay Singh-led national federation constituting an athletes' commission to resolve the grievances of the grapplers. *—PTI*

ARCHERY WORLD CUP

Indian men's and women's teams eye gold in Shanghai

SHANGHAI, 24 APRIL

The Indian men's and women's compound archery teams assured the country of a podium finish by nailing down final berths, while Dhiraj Bommadevara smashed the national record to finish third in the men's recurve qualification round in the season-opening Hyundai Archery World Cup here on Wednesday.

The fourth-seeded men's compound team comprising the experienced Abhishek Verma, newcomer Prathamesh Bhalchandra Fuge, and reigning U-21 world champion Priyansh defeated the Philippines and Denmark before displaying ominous form to upset top qualifiers South Korea to book a title showdown against the Netherlands on Saturday.

The Indian women, who are the reigning world champions and seeded No.1 here, set up a title clash with Italy, defeating Turkey and Estonia to confirm their status as the leading side in the category.The trio of reigning U-18 and senior champion Aditi Swami, Asian Games gold-medallist Jyothi Surekha Vennam, and Parneet Kaur dropped just 10 points through the two matches to confirm their superiority.

PHOTO: PTI

The Indian men's team created a major upset defeating Korea by just two points at 235-233. Tied at even after two ends, the Indians grabbed a point after the third and finished with a 59 to secure the final spot."

Our coordination was good today and we read the wind well," said Abhishek after the nerve-wracking semifinal contest against the Koreans."The semifinals are always tight matches.

—PTI